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THE
BACKWOODS' BRIDE.

A ROMANCE OF SQUATTER LIFE.

BY MRS. M. V. VICTOR,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DIME NOVELS:

448 THE TWO HUNTERS.

504 ALICE WILDE.

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CHAPTER I

THE CAMP-MEETING.

MR. GARDINER reined in his horse to take a survey of the novel scene before him. He had been leisurely riding along, thinking of the errand on which he was bent, which was, to see some squatters who had erected their cabins upon land already purchased from Government, by his agent, the previous year, when he had suddenly come into full view of a camp-meeting, the noise of which had attracted him some moments before he ascertained its cause.

The camping-ground had been selected on the borders of one of those fairy lakes, which gleam like enchanted mirrors out of their emerald frames, and are set in the most unexpected places, every here and there, through certain portions of Michigan. Curious and unaccountable these lakes are, for, though many are small enough to throw a stone across, and one of them is named Dollar Lake, so small and round and bright is it, they are cold and fathomless.

Close down to the narrow strip of silver sand, which circled the dimpled sheet of water, grew beautiful groves, whose trees, though tall and promising, had nothing of the ancient solemnity of some of our primeval forests,—for these were of youthful growth, and had sprung up within twenty years on grounds which had erst been desolated by annual fires. In the mingled shadow and sunshine of this lovely spot, were gathered together two or three hundred people. Rude seats of boards, supported on the stumps of saplings which had been sawn off some sixteen or eighteen inches from the ground, surrounded the speaker's stand, which was canopied by the noble branches of one of the largest oaks.

Upon these seats many of the congregation were now sitting, but, as many others were scattered about in the doors of their tents, and in their wagons, while some of the more youthful and reckless of the crowd were perched in the trees, where they could "see the fun," disturb with sly pranks the more serious-minded, and send down grimaces to their fellow sinners. The wagons were drawn up

In a semicircle, at a little distance, many of them covered, and answering the purpose of tents; while, within this circle, another, formed of tents of all shapes and patterns, the most of them made of poles, covered over thickly with the green branches of the forest, after the manner of Indian wigwams; others, of blankets, blue, red and striped, and still others of snowy white cloth, most likely some of the good housewives' homespun sheets.

At the moment of Harry Gardiner's reaching the camp, one of the preachers was offering up a prayer. With the natural reverence of a noble nature, Harry took off his cap, and remained respectfully listening. The preacher was a broad-chested, black-haired, brown-faced man, who looked fitted in stature and muscle to hold earthly, as well as spiritual warfare. When he first began his prayer, his voice was a clear whisper, which blended in with the rustling of the leaves and the murmur of the lake, as if nature and man were praying together, and with an inconceivably sweet and thrilling effect. So soul-subduing it was, that even the human monkeys and squirrels in the tree-tops ceased their pranks, and the rough men who were whistling and defying the effects of the preaching, began to open their mouths and put their hands in their pockets, in attitude of attention.

Harry saw four villanous-looking fellows, who were playing cards inside a covered wagon, forget their game, and bend to listen, as the whisper rose, as the whisper of a storm rises in the forest, until that strange, deep, powerful voice swayed its hearers to and fro; sighed and shrieked, and thundered in a mighty tempest of supplication, which shook the people as reeds are shaken in a fearful wind. Then that excitable gathering, made up mostly of those unused to controlling their emotions, and whose feelings had already been powerfully wrought upon, began to weep and wail, blending their lamentation with the voice which almost fiercely implored their salvation. The deep "amen" of the deacons, the sobbing of the women, the groans of the men, were borne aloft by that tempest of entreaty, until Harry, young and enthusiastic as was his temperament, almost looked for a miracle in the shape of a special answer from the depths of the calm, blue sky above them. Hardly would he have wondered, had those blue, ethereal curtains parted, and through a flood of golden light, the Dove had descended, whispering, "Peace, be still!" to the tumultuous multitude.

At last the prayer was ended. Strong as appeared his bodily powers, the speaker seemed exhausted, mentally and physically, as he sank upon his seat, and wiped the swarthy brow now almost pale with emotion. He had "wrestled with God" for these people whom he loved; and not only with God, but with the devil, whom, he was bound, should not have a single one of these congregated souls. In the comparative silence which followed his sitting down, the sobs and screams of women, who were rocking themselves to and fro, or who had flung themselves prone upon the ground as well as the shouts and groans of the men, became more audibly

Harry dismounted, and tying his horse to a tree, went forward near the benches. The thought had struck him that the men he wished to see were doubtless, many of them, at this meeting; and during the noon recess, which was now approaching, he would have an opportunity of speaking with them.

"For shame, Susan Carter, to set here without shedding a tear, and listen to such preachin' and prayin' as we've heard this mornin'. Your heart must be as hard as the nether mill-stone. There's Polly Hubbard faintin' away, now, in her mother's arms, — and she was always a better girl than you, — hadn't nigh so much need of repentance."

"Indeed, Aunt Debby, I joined in the prayer with all my soul; but I shouldn't like to make such a public exhibition of my feelings as that."

Harry Gardiner looked at the speakers, who occupied a seat close beside him, as he stood in the outer edge of the circle. One of them was a spinster of about five-and-forty, with a narrow and peaked face, down either side of which, a few wiry ringlets of black hair, were permitted to fall. She wore one of the immense bonnets of that period, a fine leghorn, which cost fifteen dollars, and was to last fifteen years. Her green dress and white vandyke, looked prim and neat. Beside her sat a girl of seventeen or eighteen, so fresh, and fair, and pretty, by contrast, as a young violet to a frost-bitten marigold. It was a warm summer day, and her straw bonnet was lying in her lap. The flickering shadows of the maple-trees above them, played over her brown tresses, and smooth, white forehead, and made flitting patterns over her simple white frock. Just at this moment, when Harry first observed her, the flush in her cheek, and the tears which trembled like two great diamonds on her drooped eyelashes, made her especially lovely. The rebuke of her self-righteous relative had made the flood to brim over, which the words of the preacher had already caused to rise.

"Shouldn't like to 'umble yourself, you mean," continued the aunt, tartly. "A girl that can lead off the dance as spry as you, needn't talk about being afraid to make a show of herself. If you'd dance less, and pray more, you'd be nigher your duty than you are now. If you'd a right sense of your own want of grace, you'd just go down on your face before the hull congregation."

"Maybe I shall gain grace, by and by, if I strive for it," was the quiet reply.

"How long do you 'spose you'll be safe in putting it off? You're well and hearty, and full of life and spirits to-day; but to-morrow you may be sick or dead, Susan Carter."

The young man shuddered slightly as this appalling thought was awakened by that loud, unrelenting tone.

"See! there's more'n a dozen goin' down to the lake to be baptized. They're making sure of their salvation, even before they get their dinners. See how happy they are, — shouting 'glory!' and clapping their hands. Is there any sinful, earthly pleasure

that is equal to their joy? — answer me that? Come! shall I tell one of the ministers you'd like to be baptized?"

"Not to-day, Aunt Debby. Indeed, I must have time to think. It's too important an act to decide upon so hastily."

"Well, I've done my duty in askin' you. You were always an obstinate, self-willed girl. There comes your father. I reckon he's thinkin' of dinner; but there's the folks to be baptized."

A pleasant-looking, hard-handed, sunburnt farmer, now approached.

Harry was quite certain that this was one of the men he wished to see, for the name — Carter — was that of one of the intruders upon his domains. He resolved upon accosting him; but the whole meeting was at present absorbed in the ceremony of baptism, which was going on. One party stood upon their bench to overlook the scene. When the sweet hymn swelled up, at the close of the sacred rites, Harry was touched alike by the fervent enthusiasm of the people, and the beauty of the place and scene. The limpid clearness of the lake, where it stretched out over a bed of silver sand, before coming to the "jumping-off" place into immeasurable depths, fitted it peculiarly for the office it served. The trees stood around the shore like solemn witnesses.

As the grand old hymn reverberated through the forest, Harry stole a glance at the sweet countenance of Susan, which was all trembling and alight with pure worship and gladness. The slight stain of tears upon her cheeks softened her somewhat brilliant beauty. Rustic as was her white frock, her blue scarf, and kid slippers, she looked so innocent, so maidenly, so refined, that she gave an impression of all womanly sweetness and excellence.

"I shall be sorry if I've got to put *her* father to trouble," mused Harry.

When the singing ceased, and the crowd began to scatter among the tents and wagons, he introduced himself to Mr. Carter, stating that he had chanced upon the camp, while trying to find his way to his house. Without stopping to inquire the nature of his business, the squatter gave him a welcome, inviting him to dine with him in his tent. Harry felt reluctant to eat the salt of a man whose interests he was about to interfere with; but conscious of intending to act with the strictest justice, he concluded to accept the hospitality. It was a pretty sight to him, to sit in the door of the tent, and see Susan fill the kettle from a pail of water which her father brought from the lake, and hang it on the crane made by laying a pole across a couple of crotches. With more taste than was displayed by many of their neighbors, she spread a white table-cloth on the grass beside the tent, arranging upon it the cold ham and bread, pickles, and pies which formed their homely luncheon. When the water boiled, she set the coffee to steeping, and its savory odor, and the fanciful blaze and sparkle of the stick fire, were very pleasant.

All these things Harry noted and enjoyed silently, while he was talking sociably with his host. He was not so fastidious but that

he relished the coffee served up in tin cups, and the bread and meat which each one cut for himself, when they were finally summoned to the table, and waited upon by the half-shy, half-mirthful, Susan.

The elder woman, who had been addressed as Aunt Debby by her companion, had been holding a mournful conversation with a young minister upon the subject of the vanity and frivolity of so many extremely young girls, say, those who were younger than herself; and how foolish and indiscreet to say nothing of sinful, it would be for a young man, called to serve the Lord, to set his affections upon any of these giddy high-flyers, when the summons to luncheon caused her to join the family party. When she found herself seated upon the grass opposite a young man, good-looking, well-dressed, and of the most agreeable manners, the sad severity of her countenance melted away like frost beneath the glances of the sun. She took an unobserved opportunity to pinch her cheeks and give a twist to her raven ringlets.

"Comin' among us to settle, sir?" she inquired, in a pungent voice, which was to the ear as sweetened vinegar is to the taste.

"I have hardly decided," answered the young stranger, "I have purchased a large amount of land, and other property in this section of your State; and if I like the country, I may think it best to stop and look after my possessions myself."

"I must fain hope you'll find it to your interest to do so sir. We young people feel the need of congenial society very much. It's true there's a good many youth of the opposite sex — more than there are of my own, at present — but they are scarcely such as we would wish to encourage — that is Susan and myself — except as mere acquaintance. We shouldn't think of them as partners for life, or any thing of *that* kind, you know."

Harry darted a swift glance at the young girl, but her eyes were bent upon the coffee-pot, and only the smallest corner of a smile was peeping out from behind her dimples.

"If my interest in the country deepens as rapidly as it threatens to, I shall be unable to tear myself away," he said.

The spinster looked flattered; that winning tone and polite bow set her ancient heart in a flutter, under its white vandyke; but her niece raised her pretty head with a sudden pride, which warned the young gentleman to be more discreet in his compliments.

"At least, I shall long remember this day," he continued, "for this is the first camp-meeting I ever attended."

"It's a purty spot for a campin'-ground," remarked the squatter.

The smoke curling up among the trees from more than a score of tiny fires, the groups gathered about them; the neighing of horses; the odors of violets and moss, blended with the flavors of the cooking; the gleam of the silver lake; the hum of conversation; the dim recesses opening back in the woods; the curiously-contrasted figures of the motley assembly; the occasional shout of "hallelujah!" and "glory!" from some happy soul; blent with the whoop of mis-

chievous boys, all went to make up a vivid picture, as novel as it was interesting.

"I don't wonder that last preacher labored as hard as if he was thrashin' corn, when I think what a set he's fightin' with the devil for," continued Mr. Carter, while his guest's eyes dwelt thoughtfully upon the scene. "Thar's some of the hardest cases in this crowd there is in the hull State, and that's sayin' a good deal; for, if ever a State was overrun with wickedness, it's Michigan. Some folks hinks Arkansaw is wuss, and mebbe it is; but to my thinkin', this s gettin' to be about as bad as it can. Why, sir, a third of this ere crowd is blacklegs and horse-thieves. They allers 'tend camp-meetin'. It's a good place to get together, and see what's goin' on. But once and a while one on'em gets caught before he knows it. Some hard-fisted minister knocks the truth right into him, and he jest give up. Sometimes, p'raps, just as he's thinkin' up the orfull-est wickedness, he'll swaller somethin' he's heard, and it'll stick in his throat like a fish-hook, and he can't get away, no, sir! he's caught the bait, and is hauled, spite of himself, straight into the kingdom. One of them that was baptized this noon was Jeff Grimes, one of the hardest cases in the country. He's been in state-prison twice for counterfeitin' and horse-stealin'; he can swar a blue streak, git a fellow's watch while he is talkin' as friendly as pie with him, and run off any horse he gets his eye on. He came here, I expect, to ply his trade; but last night, a bullet from the rifle of the Lord's soldier, who was a firin' away from the pulpit th-er, hit him plump in the conscience, and down he went on the ground, as if he was dead. Some of the ministers and women was a workin' over him half the night. He was in a frightful state of mix l. Towards mornin' he got happier, and to-day he's been baptized. One such conversion as that encourages them poor preachers to a hull year of work. They see hard times, them preachers do. They run all kinds of dangers; set down by anybody's hearthstone that'll g-ve them a bed and a meal, and don't ask nothin' but enough to keep 'em alive. I ain't a member of any church, but I tell you what, my cabin is always free to 'em. As for sister Debby here, it's the delight of her life to have a preacher stoppin' at the house;" and the farmer smiled good-naturedly at her. "There's an extra allowance of eggs in the johnny-cakes, and maple-sugar in the tea on them occasions. If she don't marry a Methodist minister yet, it won't be because she hasn't striven hard enough to that end."

"Oh, brother, now you get out! I shall always do my duty to the servants of the Lord, be they married or otherwise. But I'm by no means set on one for a husband. Any good man — that is, one not specially bad, would not be refused by me if I wished to marry, which you know, I do not. They're always teasing me about matrimony," she continued, with a youthful smile directed to their guest, "when nothing can be farther from my thoughts. You won't mind them, now, will you, sir?" with a slight coquettishness. "If I wished to assume connubial relations, I should have done so years ago — that is

a few years ago, before I was twenty. It is sometimes so painful to refuse the solicitations of the other sex, and so distressing to witness the despair kindled upon a noble heart by an unmitigated negative, that I have several times been almost induced — but of this no more."

"It must be a cruel task for the fair and gentle hand of woman to perform so severe a work as that of heaving despair upon a breaking heart," rejoined Harry, with a gallantry that was delightful to the recipient. "But perhaps we are not so sensitive to giving pain as you would have us be. Some women, I could imagine, would take pleasure in tormenting the hearts in their power;" and he looked over at Susan.

"Aunt Debby, they're going to sing."

"Oh, my! I must join them, then. They need my help very much. You will put away the things, Susan;" and she hurried forward into the ring which surrounded the minister, who was leading the hymn.

Harry could clearly distinguish that shrill voice rising above all others, and soaring above through the tree-tops with an ear-piercing exultation that was surprising.

"If you want to talk on business," said the squatter, "come down here under the shelter of that little bank by the lake. We can sit there and talk, undisturbed. It ain't hardly respectful to be taking one of our worldly affairs right here in the very heart of the gospel. When the things are put away, you'd better join your aunt, Susan;" and the two men strode out of the crowd, down to a cool and quiet nook, where a mound in the forest had shelved off into the water, leaving half the roots of the tree it had exposed to the air, and beneath those roots a dry beach of silvery sand and a flat stone, upon which they seated themselves to discuss busi-

ness.

CHAPTER II.

SQUATTER'S TROUBLES.

When this talk was over, the two arose and Harry Gardner, looking flushed and displeased, mounted his horse, and rode away in search of the nearest tavern, while Enos Carter, pale with anger, moved hither and thither in the congregation, speaking to this one and that, who immediately left their places, and followed him out of hearing of the meeting into the depths of the grove, where violent words and excited gestures broke forth without restraint.

When Harry had started for the West to look up his property, and claim his rights, he had small idea of the disagreeable and even dangerous nature of his business. He had heard that a whole band of emigrants, from one of the eastern states, had squatted upon his land the previous year. He was sorry for the disappointment they must suffer when they found they had appropriated purchased land; but he felt, at the same time, that they should have been more careful in their choice. He was resolved to pay them, as far as was in his power, for the improvements they had made, or sell them their farms for the sum he had paid for them, which was certainly a just and generous offer; very generous, since he purchased to speculate, and had expected to sell for a handsome advance.

But the moment he opened the subject with Mr. Carter, the man had grown angry and unreasonable. There had been, with others in their vicinity, so much trouble in the same way, or by squatters not entering their land, and having it afterward sold from them, that one of those deep and deadly prejudices, which took such root in new and ignorant communities, had sprung up among these squatters, and they had sworn to yield their assumed rights to no man. Coming to the West with just means enough to put up a shanty to shelter them, and to pay for provisions until they could raise money, they settled wherever they pleased, without paying the government for their farms, and, in many cases, without entering them; so that, when the land came to be surveyed and put up for sale it was longed away from them.

In this particular case, they had chanced upon a section already sold to Harry Gardner, who, having money which he wished to invest, had employed an agent to look up promising western land for him. He had paid the government price for it, and had run out of his money two years, and he naturally felt very little like surrendering his claim.

On the other hand, these men, in their ignorance, somewhat mistaking the nature of the laws, and firmly believing that in the new country men were entitled to all they could cultivate, had, unfortunately, put their little worldly-all into improvements. For over a year they had worked hard, ensuring the privations of settlers' lives. They had burnt themselves legions, and filled them with rude furniture. All winter they had felled trees and split fence-rails, and now the grain had just been harvested for the first time, from the fields that had been tilled in. After selling these places for the bare worth of the improvements, and taking their wives and little ones to another wilderness, there to pass through another series of hardships, was not to be thought of peacefully. And as to paying even government prices for their farnes, it would take the gains of three years to do it at least.

After setting fire to the smoldering passions of his companions, Mr. Carter sat aside, thinking gloomily of the threatened misfortune. The picture of his neat log cabin, with its two rooms and a little rose-vine before him. He saw the wild-rose which Susan had planted, clustering over the window, and the little vegetable garden in the rear, and the border of wild blue violets around the front of the house. He had promised himself to buy a yoke of oxen with the money made off the grain this year, that he might have the wherewithal to raise a larger crop another season. But all that money, and all he could earn for several years, would be swallowed up, and he would be still poor, and crippled for want of machinery to work with. Or, if he abandoned the place, there was that weary beginning over again. Susan's busy fingers and pretty tastes had already invested his cabin with the charms of home; the neighbors were, most of them, old acquaintances, and he had begun to look promising and cheerful, before this thunder-cloud gathered in their sky.

"Sue's seventeen now, and when she's twenty I shall be as bad off as I am now. Helpless and careful as she is, I shan't have nothing to set her up in life with, and pay her the fixin's she deserves, if she should take it into her head to get married. I don't care so much for myself nor even for a sister Betsy; but Sue—I swear I'd fight to the death before I gave up an inch."

Enos Carter was the leading man in the band of neighbors who had come west together; not on account of being any richer than the rest of them, for he was not; but he had rather more education than the others, and a good deal of executive talent; and there had been a time when he was in easy circumstances. Susan had stungily laid away in the old-fashioned bureau, which was one of the few articles of furniture they had brought with them, many relics of the more comfortable estate of her parents; carefully preserved garments of that mother, who died when she was a little girl. There were green silks and purple waists, spun and woven by their owner for the bridal night; the wedding-dress itself, of handsome brocade; a black lace veil; a set of silver tea-spoons, and three long spoons; a string of gold beads, which Susan sometimes brought forth on festive

occasions. The very white dress which she had worn to the camp-meeting had once been her mother's and was the finest of old-fashioned India mull, tucked half-way up the skirt, and with real thread-lace sewed around the neck. Other remains there were of those articles of dress and furniture, common to the best class of eastern farmers whose daughters rivaled those of their city cousins in solid education, if not in showy accomplishments. Susan's mother had been the belle of her county when she was a girl; she could paint in water-colors; write as handsomely a hand as the writing-master; parse equal to the smartest young man; and dance better than any other girl on the shores of Lake Ontario. Susan was an only child; her mother had died when she was a little girl, and her father's sister, Deborah, had taken her place as manager of the household. Aunt Debby had a good many little weaknesses, and was by no means so good a person to bring up a young maiden as the mother would have been, had she been spared; but Susan, by means of inherited grace and good sense, grew up as much like her mother as possible. It was not strange that this child was the idol of her father; and that, when reverses came upon him, and times grew hard, and living poor in their native State, he resolved, for her sake, to emigrate to a new country, where a few years of labor would enable him to gratify his ambition for her.

Thinking all this over, and the many disappointments of his life, in connection with the new trouble coming upon him, the squatter rose, and strode among the high-talking company.

"Neighbors and friends," said he, "I swear, for one, to fight it out."

"And I," "and I," echoed all the rest.

"We'll hang that dandified youngster on the nearest tree, before we'll allow him to interfere with what's ours," exclaimed a low-bred, ugly-looking man, the roughest of the set.

"No, no, neighbor; we'll not make ourselves liable to the law," interposed Enos Carter; "but we'll scare him out of it. We'll frighten him, so he won't want to show his face in these parts again."

"We'll give him a coat of tar and feathers; but but but! It'll become him better than the broadcloth coat he wears," spoke another.

"We've got plenty of rails — we'll give him a ride," joined a third.

Out of all the number, there was not one man to ask whether the rights of the young landowner, or to place his position in the light of justice before the rest — so does self-interest blind the eyes, and prejudice deafen the ears of people; and when these two are united with ignorance, the result may be dreaded, both by large institutions and by single individuals. All good which might have resulted from the preaching, was now overthrown in the distracted mind of Mr. Carter; and upon returning to camp, he struck his tent, packed up his contents in the wagon, hitched to it the one horse, which had been his only servant through the labors of the year, called his sister and daughter away from the sermon, and drove home in ominous silence.

Susan was buried in thought between wondering what had come over her father, and what had become of the interesting stranger who had dined with them, and whether she should ever see him again, recalling his pleasant voice and that unstudied ease, so different from the basalid awkwardness of the neighboring young men. Aunt Deborah was dwelling on the eloquence of a certain bachelor minister, half-unheard by the pre-occupied minds of the other two, until she suddenly broke away from the matter in hand by exclaiming: "Lad! I wonder what's become of that Mr. Gardiner! I thought, likely, as he'd business with you, he'd go home with you. He was a sweet young man, and so polite."

"Cass his politeness!" broke forth the farmer so sternly, that Susan involuntarily drew away from his side, as if the whip he flourished might descend upon her. "I'd like to give him a good horsewhipping with this very whip; and I will yet, and he don't look out for himself, the scoundrel!"

"What has he done, father?" asked Susan, her heart sinking, for she had, even more than she was aware, formed a very favorable opinion of the stranger.

In words by no means softly chosen, the squatter informed his family of the nature of Mr. Gardiner's business, and of the sworn resolve of those concerned to repel him.

"But, father," said Susan, gently, "I don't see why you speak so bitterly of him. It seems to me it's not his fault, but our misfortune. For my part I'd rather get along just as we have, and go without every thing, to pay for our land, than to feel that I had wronged the rightful owner out of it."

"And who's the rightful owner, I'd like to know?" retorted the father, firmly. "God made this earth to be free to all; and whoever takes wild land, and clears it, and cultivates it, makes it his own—he's a right to it. What right have these men that never did a day's work in their lives, coming along and takin' the bread out of our mouths? We've made up our minds that we'll put a rope around that young dandy's neck, before we'll pay him for what's ours."

"That's him, now, standing in the door of Giles' tavern," said Deborah.

Giles' tavern was a two-story house of squared logs, standing on the edge of the road in a piece of woods, about two miles from the cabin of Mr. Carter. He had intended to water his horse at the trough in front, but upon hearing the exclamation of his sister, he drove straight past, without looking in that direction. Susie stole a timid glance, and thought the young gentleman Landsomer than ever, as he lifted his straw hat respectfully in reply to her half-repressed nod. He looked so manly and honest, she would not believe that he intended to oppress and injure them; and she regretted the angry mood into which her father had worked himself.

Their little home, shadowed by oaks, and trellised with wild-roses and morning-glories, the seeds of which Susie had brought with her from the East, looked so peaceful and comfortable, after a two days'

absence, that it increased the sadness weighing upon all hearts. The rays of the declining sun streamed under the trees, and lighted up the door brilliantly, showering gold dust all over the white dress and brown tresses of Susie, as she sprang out of the wagon, and ran to open the cabin.

But the farmer only grumbled at the auspicious omen.

CHAPTER III.

A SCENE AT MIDNIGHT

GILES' tavern was the head-quarters of a great many different classes of people; as it was the best and almost the only stopping-place between two far-apart towns. Speculators and buyers of land were sometimes compelled to stop there days at a time. It had all the chance custom of ordinary travel; and, though well kept and respectable, no doubt gamblers frequently found it convenient to assemble there; and it was well known that a gang of counterfeiters had once carried on their nefarious business in one of its upper apartments. Small need, however, was there of counterfeiters in those days of wild-cat banks, when anybody who had a little real or assumed property, could set up a bank for himself. After the disasters of 1836-7, the people of Michigan wanted money, and the obliging legislature passed laws which enabled every man to make it for himself. Thousands of these worthless notes flooded the State, and if the excitable, inconsistent populace, now lynching a man who asked to have his notes redeemed, and then burning in effigy the officers of the very banks they defended — if this populace did make a run on one of these peculiar institutions, it was very apt to find that in return for any quantity of rice paper currency, there was a dollar and fifty cents in copper coin in the vaults of the bank, and some spavined horses, broken-down carriages, and unsalable city water-lots, out of it for their security. All of which is by-the-way.

Harry Gardner had been several days at the tavern. He had visited all the squatters who had settled on his land, and made them the proposition we mentioned in the beginning, but they had all shown a spirit which convinced him that affairs could not be amicably arranged, and he was now about to employ an attorney to recover his rights for him.

Although they had brought it on themselves, they were doubly infuriated at the prospect of the trouble and expense of going to law. The landlord of the tavern had warned him of personal danger, but Harry was brave, and laughed at the idea. He carried, as all travelers in those days did, a brace of pistols; though he would have declined to use them in any common encounter. If a man attacked him with his fists, he would use the same weapons, and he was not afraid of the hardest of the grounders.

On the particular evening of which we are writing, he had noticed a larger crowd than usual gathered in the bar-room to drink whiskey and talk over the affairs of the day. Among these loung-

ers were almost all the squatters who were at enmity with him. He observed, without much caring for, their hovering glances and muttered threats. As they would not be friendly with him, and he had no taste for bar-room revelry, he retired early to the little room which he occupied, and spent the evening writing letters. At eleven o'clock, the light was still shining from his window, for he had got in the mood for clearing up all delinquent correspondence. He had just sealed the last letter, when there came a light tap at his door; he opened, and beheld with surprise, Susan Carter standing there, her face pale and hands trembling. She stepped in, he immediately closed the door, and herself shut it behind them. She had on a large camel's cloak, though it was an August night, and a large sun bonnet, which she pushed back as she entered. "You are in danger, and I have come to warn you of it," she whispered. "Danger?" asked the young man, half incredulously, looking at the pale young face, whose eyes were unnaturally bright.

"Yes! Father told me all about it. He is one of them. He would never forgive me if he knew I had stolen through the woods to warn you, and I should be disgraced if they found me here. But I could not help it — I could not keep still and know that an innocent person was going to be injured, perhaps murdered, who knows? That Dan Sturgiss is an ugly fellow, and he is the ringleader. As soon as Aunt Debby was in bed, I stole out and ran all the way. I've been half an hour watching a chance to slip in the back door."

"But what is this terrible danger, my dear child?"

"You need not smile, Mr. Gartner. You may be brave, but they are too many for you. The squatters have made up their minds to get rid of you. They're gathering down in the bar-room now, and the landlord dare not tell you. At midnight they are to take you out of bed, tar-and-feather you, and ride you out of the county. They will disgrace you, if they don't kill you."

"And you do not wish to see me disgraced? You are very generous to risk so much for me, Miss Carter."

She blushed deeply, but continued hurriedly in an imploring tone.

"Do fly while you have a chance. There is no one on this side of the house; you can blow out the light, and drop down from the window — it is not far."

"I shall not fly," said the young man, doubtfully.

"Indeed, indeed, Mr. Gartner, I heard them talking about the creek, and about giving you a good ducking. You do not know what such men as Dan Sturgiss will do, when they're roused. They'll be sure to drown you. And father will be mixed up in it," she added bursting into tears.

"I shall shoot the two first men who enter my room, and then turn in and thrash the rest;" and he drew a deep breath. At the moment, they heard feet cautiously ascending the stairs, and voices in the passage. Susan clasped her hands. There was no fastening to the door but a stout bolt; this Harry turned, and then throwing up the window, he seized the girl by the waist — "You

must not be compromised," he said, and lifting her through the window, he lowered her by one of her arms as far as possible, and let her drop.

The men by this time were pushing at the door. Taking up his pistols, which lay upon the stool at which he had been writing, Harry stood, awaiting the onslaught of the intruders. One push of a powerful shoulder, and the door yielded, revealing a score of determined men, their faces burning with revenge and hate. The cool, firm demeanor of the man they had expected to capture asleep in his bed, somewhat daunted them, coupled as it was, by the brace of pistols held up unswervingly.

"The first who steps a foot inside this door is a dead man," he said, as they made a motion to enter.

There was a moment's pause. The huge form of Dan Scarpie, almost filled the door, hesitating at the deadly look of the weapons before him.

"Oh, cuss it, if that's yer game, I'm up to't," he muttered and quick as thought he drew a pistol from his pocket and fired.

He had not paused to take steady aim, but bounded forward the instant he fired; but he was met in that first step by a shot which leveled him to the floor. The next man behind him was Elmer Carter. With a whoop of fury the party pressed forward, now that the door had been shot, careless of results. Harry fired his last pistol, and Carter staggered to the wall. Harry saw that it was him, with a pang of regret; but he was fighting in self-defense, and he dared not pause to repent. Now that his weapons were exhausted, the room filled with his assailants; one, two, three, he leveled with a chair, and then, finding that numbers must certainly overpower him, and not afraid of any imputation of cowardice after the manner in which he had met the enemy, he seized a favorable instant, and sprang through the window still open behind him. He caught the ledge of the window with his hand, and hung a second, that he might drop with less force upon his feet, dropped and ran. Two or three sprang out after him, and others dashed down the stairs in pursuit. A forest lay back of the tavern, into whose depths he plunged; but he had run but a short distance before his ankle, which he had sprained in leaping from the window, gave out, and refused to assist him. Some of his pursuers had lighted torches, and under these discouraging circumstances he resolved to climb a tree, whose thick foliage would screen him, where, perched in its upper branches, he awaited the result of this unexpected affair.

With his ankle giving him great physical pain, and with his mind distressed at the probability of his having taken human life, he remained in his uncomfortable situation until long after the morning broke. Weary and hungry, and feeling that the community at large ought to bear him out in the course he had taken, whatever the squatters themselves might design, he finally descended from his concealment and limped back to the tavern. Sparse as was the settlement quite a crowd had collected about the house, and as soon as he

made his appearance a constable advanced from it with a warrant for his arrest for the murder of Daniel Sturgiss, and for making an assault with intent to kill, upon Enoch Carter.

"Was Carter much hurt?" was the first question he asked.

"Can't tell yet whether it'll be fatal or not. The doctor thinks he's dangerous," replied the constable.

"Where is he?"

"Home."

"Poor Susie," murmured Harry, to himself.

The prisoner only asked for some breakfast, and to have his ankles bandaged, and to get some papers from his room; and then he was marched away amid the admiration of some of the crowd, and the fierce threats and imprecations of others. The jail was a log edifice, similar to the tavern, with the exception of strong bolts, and iron bars across the windows. It was about four miles from the tavern, and the riotous crowd who escorted the prisoner, passed the edifice of Enoch Carter on its way. There they paused, and would have given yells of vengeance, had not the doctor appeared at the door, motioning them to be silent. The prisoner cast a longing, regretful glance at the little house, but he saw no one save the doctor, and rode on in silence until he came to the prison in which he was so suddenly to be shut out from business and pleasure, from sunshine and liberty, to ponder in solitude the unpleasantness of his position.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRIAL — VERDICT — THE MOB

THE funeral of Dan Sturgiss was a curious affair. Half the county attended it; and it was more like a triumphant procession than a funeral march, when they wended their way to the grave, so excited was the populace, and so loud the whispers and deep the oaths which disturbed it. As the coffin was lowered into the ground, and the first shovelful of earth rattled upon it, the men who had borne it on their shoulders to the spot, and who were the same concerned in the conspiracy against the one who had caused this death, clasped hands across the unfilled grave, and swore to attempt vengeance upon the murderer, should the law fail to convict him.

Weeping and distracted, with five little ones, frightened and crying, clinging about her, the widow, in her poor garments, and with only a piece of black ribbon on her bonnet for mourning, was a sight sufficient of itself to rouse her neighbors to hatred and revenge against him who had brought this upon her. It is true that Dan had been a bad husband, had provided very illy for her, and that she could scarcely be worse off without than with him, — but all this was forgotten now, both by herself and her friends. A contribution was taken up on the spot, each of the squatters, with whom money was the scarcest of articles, giving what few shillings change he had in his pocket, and some of the better classes, who had come from here and there out of curiosity to hear the story, giving a dollar or two apiece, — so that Mrs. Sturgiss took back to her home more money than she had ever possessed at one time before — sufficient to lay in a store for winter, both of food and clothing.

None of that paying crowd who witnessed her distress had a thought for the worthless misery which would have come upon a pleasant Eastern home, where a fond mother and beautiful sisters spent their evenings recalling the many virtues of the only son and brother, had Harry Gardner, their pride and idol, allowed himself to be dragged to an ignominious death by those very compassionate men.

From the funeral the crowd hurried away to the justice's office, a shanty set up in the shadow of the jail, where at three o'clock, the prisoner was to go through the formality of a preliminary examination. When he was brought forth from the jail, and obliged to pass through a dense crowd in order to reach the office, a man with a grain of cowardice in his composition would have betrayed some shrinking from the sea of threatening faces surrounding him, and

the wild cries, the shaking fists, and muttered oaths. But Harry never even changed color. His bearing won the admiration of every one who had not some personal motive in disliking him. He was not slow to perceive that he had almost as many friends as enemies. There were landholders and rich men scattered through the country, who had had great trouble with the squatters, and these, of course, sympathized with him. And as the worst of men always set a high value upon physical courage, Harry had also a large body of friends among the dregs of the collected crowd.

The squatters had tried to get up a concerted movement for seizing the prisoner, and inflicting summary punishment with their own hands; they displayed a stout, new rope, and made other demonstrations, but the opposing party were so numerous that they finally concluded to wait a better opportunity.

Court sat the first of September, and it was now late in August; the prisoner waived any defence at present, and after a brief examination, was remanded back to jail to await his trial.

The jail was at the crossing of two roads; and with a small log structure, which was dignified as a court-house, a lawyer's office and house in one, the justice's office, and half a dozen other tenements, made up a little village. There was a tavern, of course, but its reputation for fried chicken and clean beds was not equal to Giles' tavern, and it was therefore less patronized, except at court-time, when it overflowed even into the neighboring houses.

It was after dark of the fifth day of his incarceration, as Harry sat in his room, thinking of home, and how uncomfortable the chain about his leg felt,—for as the jail was not very secure, they had made sure of him, by chaining him—and of what his mother and sisters would feel if they knew his situation, and kind of dully wondering, as people in great emergencies will, whether he, Harry Galtner, so young—so well-to-do, so active, so much interested in himself and the world, would really, in a few brief weeks, be cut off from his career on earth by a hangman's rope. These thoughts were drifting through his mind like black shadows through the air, when his jailer drew the bolts and admitted a visitor to see him.

Harry had already received a good many calls, which the jailer, who was secretly friendly to him, had permitted, and he was not much surprised at this. The dim light of the one smoky lamp did not reveal very clearly the features of his visitor, who appeared to be a tall, slender man, in very ill-fitting clothes, and who had a basket in his hand, which had previously been examined by the jailer. As soon as the latter had retired, the stooped hat drawn over his face was lifted, and Harry, to his astonishment, gradually recalled the face of no other person than Miss Deborah Carter. A sweet hope that Susan had commissioned her with some message, spring up in his heart—he had so wished to hear if Susan hated him beyond forgiveness for the injury he had inflicted on her father. The thought of the suffering he must have caused her, had troubled him more than his own concerns.

"Miss Carter!" he exclaimed, springing up and darting forward a step, jerked back again by the chain, whose presence he had forgotten.

"He! he! Mr. Gardner, I hope you won't consider me *too* in delicate, appearing in your presence in man's attire. Nothing but — but — you must understand me — my pity for your situation could have — induced me to take such a step — I —"

"Did Miss Susan send you?"

"Susan! no indeed, not she! you might hang for all she cares. Ever since her father was brought in, she's done nethin' but tend him, and cry."

"How is he?"

"Well, he's been bad; but he's a little better. I know it must seem heartless to his only sister to be bringing pie and cake to the man that came so nigh to murdering him, — and that's why I borrowed his clothes, to come in. If the neighbors should find it out, they'd shame me out of the community. But" — with a deep sigh — "I couldn't help it. Ever since the first moment of our acquaintance, I've felt differently to you from what I ever did to any other of the male sex. I'd have died before you should have guessed it, if this thing hadn't happened. But how could I know your danger and conceal my bursting heart? I knew Mrs. Green was an awful cook, and so I just took the liberty of bringing you some of my own pumpkin pie and pound-cake. I've took every pains with 'em, and I know they're nice. Oh, sir! you'd never guess the feelings that overcame me as I was heating up the eggs for that cake," — and a profound sigh, which was almost a groan, attested to her sincerity.

Surprised and confused by this unexpected confession from the tall stranger, Harry blushed like a girl at the avowal of her first lover, murmuring — "I'm really greatly obliged to you, Miss Carter, both for these nice entrees, and for the interest you have expressed in my case. I feel quite hopeful of a good result. I really can not make up my mind that I am to die the death of a convicted murderer."

"If you should ever be released, you'll forget the boldness of your unhappy Deborah, won't you, now? — promise me!"

"I can not promise to forget your kindness. We usually remember with gratitude those who are kind to us in our dark hours."

"I'll not of gratitude! it is too cold a term. Oh, if you can never, never respond to the emotions you have called forth, then say so soon. If I cannot have your first affections, I wish for nothing less. This is strange talk, isn't it — and for a consistent member of the Methodist church? I know not what it was, whether it was your eyes, or your sweet smile, or your politeness — I know not what spell it was — oo! hoo! but I — ho! ho! — felt at once — ho! hoo! hoo!" — and breaking down into a regular crying-spell, this victim of misplaced love, sobbed hysterically.

For Deborah! she was really undoubtedly in love; and that strange mistake under which maidens of her age often seem to labor, with regard to their charms, and the imperceptibility of their age

had inspired her with a faint hope that her devotion might win a response. Poor Deborah indeed! — when all this time the man to whom she had committed herself, was only thinking what sweet reprieve would have been his, if, instead of this grenadier sent, there had come stealing into his cell that shy, bright, beautiful niece, to make him the same confession. For, just as singularly, as pious particular Deily had suddenly succumbed to his good qualities, had Harry been enchanted by the fresh beauty and purity of Susan Carter. And since he had been confined to that wearisome prison-room, he had thought so much of that pale, lovely apparition appearing to warn him of his danger, and of a deeper feeling than pity which, he thought, he had detected in her tremulous tones, that she seemed to him an old acquaintance, — a sweet star which had always shone upon his life instead of a transient light which had beamed upon him once or twice.

“Don’t, don’t, my dear Miss Carter, pray don’t give way,” he pleaded, in distress, as her sobs accumulated. “Indeed, I have a very — very high respect for you, — and I shall always remember your pound-cake — and — and — and — your goodness —” and in his sincere compassion for her, he came very near putting his arm about that virgin waist, and consoling her with a kiss.

But we need not attempt to describe his situation to those of our young lady readers who have been in a similar one with a fellow-being of the other sex. Almost to his relief, the jailer knocked at the door to signify that the half-hour of the interview had expired. Hastily slouching her hat over her eyes, and taking up the empty basket, whose contents now enveloped Harry’s lonely torso, she **whispered in his ear —**

“They talk of taking you out of jail and stringing you up without judge or jury. But I don’t believe they’ll be at all wroth. You’ve friends as well as enemies. Oh, dear, dear! if I could point out some way to get you out of this, I’d do it, whether you married me or not.”

“What did Miss Susan say when they brought her father home?” asked Harry, detaining her a moment, as she squeezed his hand.

“I’m sure I don’t precisely recollect what the silly thing said. I believe she said — ‘I should think he might have chosen out somebody besides my father.’”

“Of course she would say that,” murmured the prisoner. “Well, good-by, and God bless you.”

At this the spanster would have broken out afresh, but the door opened, and the fear of detection repressed her. Again squeezing his hand hysterically, she departed; from that time forward to the day of the trial, Harry did not want for delicious food to satisfy the cravings of physical hunger, though he, the warlike, the valiant boy at home, was sometimes sorely furnished for a word of love or a gentle caress. Yet as he had refused such as was offered him, it was a proper punishment that he should be deprived of all other

That terrible day arrived within a fortnight. People had come from a circuit of fifty miles to be present at the trial. An unusual interest was aroused by the party character of the case, the squatters and their associates being against, and the richer class of the community for the prisoner. Every house in the settlement was thronged with spectators, glad of the privilege of sleeping on the floor where beds could not be had. The court had great difficulty in keeping order all day, as nearly every man had formed and expressed an opinion. Several days were consumed in this tedious business, but, on the day of trial, — for, should there be a preponderance in favour of the prisoner, the jury, the chances of the accused would be small indeed. Harry's lawyer informed him that the jury was as good as sworn, and that he did not believe they would have any serious trouble in carrying the case through to a triumphant issue. Harry felt that his object was to inspire them with courage, and smiled proudly. His was a nature, that if he had known he was marching to certain death, would never have been so near his enemy a moment of triumph.

The majority of the mass of people gathered in and about the little court-house, on the day of trial, had never beheld the prisoner, and even he was concealed by a stout guard from the jail to the bar, he did not escape the orb of a thousand eager eyes.

His youth and beauty, and the singular frankness of his expression, mingled with a bearing of quiet courage, won upon a portion of the multitude, just as it excited that covetous hatred of the lower classes, which is of all hatred the most deadly.

The lawyer employed by the State, was a man and friend of power, and feeling it for his interest to secure the goodwill of the voting majority — the people, he put forth his efforts to please them, and conceal the prisoner of wild murder. Harry would not really have believed of a verdict of wild murder, but he did form an idea of manslaughter, and a sentence to twelve or less years of imprisonment. So he made a passionate bearing up in place of the light-hearted visions with which he had peopled the future, was enough to satisfy him — but he would not be deceived.

With a slight flush of the cheek and sparkle of the eye, he sat quietly listening to the various witnesses for the prosecution. Their testimony did not always appear to good advantage — the hot passion, the brutal rage, showed forth too visibly; and they were frequently taken aback and convicted of untruth and inconsistency by the cool questioning of the counsel for the defence. Whatever was the result, it seemed to only anger and excite the shocked and squatted spectators who filled the windows, doors, and the area without, to distraction.

The only witness called for the defence, was the tavern-keeper, who testified to the threats made in his presence against the safety of the prisoner; that he had warned him of danger; that the purpose of the men who assailed the door of his room, had been acknowledged demonstrably to be a violent assault, if not murder.

Harry was well aware that the testimony of Susan Carter would be valuable to him; but not even to enhance his own chances of safety, would he summon her as a witness, and betray the part she had played in coming to his room to warn him. He would not call that modest girl before all these glaring eyes, and bring the dislike of her own people upon her by compelling her to testify against them.

What was his surprise, therefore, after Giles had taken his seat, to see his lawyer make way for a veiled figure which came turning forward to the witness-box, and there throwing up the veil, disclosed the face of Susan Carter. She was a little pale and thin from the fatigue of watching with her father; but when she met the eyes of the prisoner, and the brilliant light which immediately came into them, a deep blush for an instant suffused her cheeks.

She gave the story of Mr. Garbner's acquaintance with her father — of what had passed between them to her knowledge on the subject of the lands — of the excited state of her father and others — of their sworn purpose to get rid of the real owner of the lands at all risks — of their plot on the night of the assault — to stop him in the creek, and perhaps drown him — of her own visit to the young man's apartment for the purpose of putting him on his guard.

"You must have taken a very peculiar interest in the prisoner, to give yourself so much trouble, and run such risks of your reputation, for a stranger," remarked the attorney for the State; and the vulgar crowd jeered and laughed at the insinuation implied in his manner.

"It was not too much trouble to take to prevent an innocent man from being murdered. I would take as much pains to prevent such a deed, as you would, sir, to bring it about. You are paid, sir, to support the cause of justice — but your sense of justice and mine are different."

The young maiden, whose every expression was eloquent, both of modesty and intrepidity, made this reply in so clear and firm a tone, looking the impertinent counselor full in the face with such honest scorn, that for a moment beauty and truth prevailed, and a wild hurrah of acclamation went up from the quickster crowd.

The court was called to order, and the fair witness retired. The little smile which played over the countenance of Harry, as she gave him a hurried glance in retiring, was reward enough for the trial it had been to her timid nature to dare the scrutiny of so many eyes in his behalf.

The speeches of the counsel on either side, were their last efforts. The rights and wrongs of the land question were reviewed in connection with the case; and both parties heard the best which could be said of their respective claims.

It was night long before the judge gave his charge to the jury. He was a prudent judge, and endeavored to lead to rather slowly; and the jury were not very clearly enlightened as to what was expected of them. Not until they had been told in a plain manner

the rear of the court-house, with the issues of life and death in their hands, did the throng which had been standing, panting for breath, and half-starved for hours, think of the wants of the body. Now they hastened themselves in search of a drink of liquor, and a bit of sustenance, but scarcely any would pause to take a comfortable supper, for fear of losing the return of the verdict.

As hour after hour passed, and the jury did not appear, the masses grew more and more excited. Some plot was evidently hatching up during the evil-disposed. There was a clamor which threatened to bring the court-house about the ears of the judge and his assistants; the feeble power of the constable could no more subdue it than a feather could breast the wind.

All at once there was a profound stillness — the jury were deſcending into their box.

“Gentlemen of the jury, what is your verdict?”

The reply of the foreman was clear and emphatic.

“Not Guilty.”

A full and free acquittal was almost more than Harry had hoped for, but he bore the triumph as he had the peril.

Immediately upon the breathless silence, arose a tremendous uproar. The shout of exultation which arose from one side, was drowned in the yells and howls of his disappointed enemies. The tumult was more than momentary; it increased instead of lessening; there was struggling and blows at the doorway — a sudden rush, and the man who had just been freed by the law, was seized by the mob and dragged out into the open air.

Harry fought like a wounded lion, but he was overpowered, his arms tied behind his back, and he was impelled along in the direction of the woods. It now became evident that he was the victim of a plot, which had been hatching up during the session of the jury in case he was not convicted. A hundred men, armed with leveled guns, fanned about him, and marched him off. Some rode forward on horses, making a great display of a rope, which they held up in the red glare of the torches they had lighted. It was now midnight. There was not a star in the sky. The rising wind moved the wild branches of the pine knots to and fro, and casting into shadow and now lighting up, the eager, maddened, devilish faces of the young man's persecutors. For when men yield themselves up with delight to the full sway of their worst passions, they become devils in good earnest.

These were terrible moments to Harry Gardiner. He thought of the anguish of his mother when she should hear of his untimely end; and the sorrow of the sisters whose protector he was, rushed over him, driving the color from his face which fear could never change. He prayed for his beloved ones, still confronting his scowling captors with dauntless eyes.

They hurried him along. Others, his friends, were following to the rescue. Defiant cries were interchanged — there was skirmishing and confusion — torches were knocked out of their holders'

hands and trampled on in a moment of comparative darkness. Harry was seized, his bonds were cut, and he was lifted on to a horse, and told to ride for his life. He struck his horse and started on, and just as the bonfire which had been kindled to light his execution, sprang into blaze beside the forest road, his enemies saw him riding past, his brown hair floating in the wind, and his hand waving over his head with a gesture of triumphant farewell.

Presently he seemed to change his mind, for he turned and rode back in the full glow of the bonfire, where he paused. His friends seeing the rash act, formed around him.

"Gentlemen," he cried, in a voice like a trumpet, "I will not run from you, as if I were a felon fleeing from justice. I have been acquitted by the laws of the land — what more would you have of me?"

"I came to this country to look up property purchased and sold for by my agent. I find others have taken possession of it. What do I do? Do I seize upon it suddenly, and all they have put in it, as I have a right to do by law? No! I give them all the time they ask to pay for what they wish. I offer to pay them for every improvement they have made, if they wish to leave. I do not hurry them. I do not discommode them. I give up my own prospects of gain, as a simple act of generosity to these men, because they are poor, and have families. And how do they repay me? They steal to my room at midnight, to seize me in bed, unarmed and asleep, that they may get rid of their duty by murdering me. This is the code of honor of these men! But I have been placed on my guard; with my weapons I protected my room, and warn them against advancing. They fire upon me. In self-protection, as it was my duty to do, I defended myself, and one of the ruffians was slain and another wounded.

"You do not like this? You would ask me to give up my property — if not that, my life! I must not even defend myself! A curious demand, you will confess.

"I shall leave this place when my business is settled, and I feel inclined. In the mean time, if any man or number of men, think best to assail me, let them try it."

So saying he rode on back to Giles' tavern, unhurried by the fury which was already cowering before his cool self-possession.

This was the last outward demonstration made at that time against the young landowner; but the spirit of hatred was only a little more concealed — not driven out.

CHAPTER V.

THE SQUATTER'S WIDOW.

"What on arth, Susan, are you sewing them two red diamonds together for, instead of a red and a white one? It's a pretty rising sun you'll have on your best quilt, if you go on at that rate. I believe you're dead in love, the way you go on lately."

"Judge by your rule, Aunt Debby, you must be pretty well suited yourself. You know you spread the table-cloth on the bed last evening, and put the tea to steep in a frying-pan."

"Nonsense!" retorted Deborah, turning as red as her sallow skin would permit; "and if I did, I guess it was because I had more to do than I could turn my hand to. You're getting to be such a slop, the work is all behindhand. All you do is to sit around, or walk around, as if you were in a dream. Are you bilious, or love-sick, or what?"

"You must judge for yourself, Aunt Debby," answered the girl, rather meekly; for the natural sweetness of her disposition was a little soiled at times by the vinegar her aunt delighted to throw in it.

"Well it looks a little like both. Seems to me you ain't nigh so fair as you used to be, and I shou'ldn't wonder if you took the Western fever. You'll have a good time shakin' if you do, and be turned as yeller as a pumpkin. And then again, the way you sigh, and the time you waste a fixin' your hair, looks like as if you was in love with *somebody*; though who on arth it can be, is more than I can tell, 'less it's that Sam White, that sneaks over here so often under the wing of his sister Jerusha."

"Sam White, indeed!" murmured Susie, scornfully.

"I guess he's as good as you'll ever get, miss; so you needn't toss your head in that fashion. Who is it, then? You used to comb and brush your hair, and put it up in three minutes, so it would look as shiny as that bureau; and this afternoon you've been standin' at that looking-glass a full hour. Do you expect anybody?"

"Not a single soul. I wasn't fixing my hair all that time, was I? I got looking into my own eyes, and thinking, I guess."

"Ain't you yourself, more like. The vanity and folly of young folks is surprising. Don't the 'postle Paul specially warn us against being light-minded and frivolous, and wearin' 'brodered hair?"

"What do you wear yours curled for, then, Aunt Debby?"

"The Lord curled my hair for me—I didn't do it myself, and since he's seen fit to make it grow so, 'tain't likely I'm fly in His face, as it were, by trying to straighten it out. Curls were always said to be very becoming to my style," and Debby cast a complacent glance in the little mirror which had been the means of entrapping Susie, that afternoon, into one of her day-dreams.

During this conversation, the two were in the front room, which was both their sleeping apartment and parlor; the door was open to the pale October sunshine, though the air was chilly enough to make the fire visible on the kitchen hearth, look particularly pleasant.

While Susie ripped apart the patchwork which she had put together so carelessly, and Debby gave her wringings an extra twist, somebody shut the garden-gate, and the next moment the widow of Dan Sturgis appeared at the open door. Her appearance caused a momentary pang of memory to shoot through Susie's mind.

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Sturgiss? Walk right in," said Debby. "I haven't seen you in some time! How'r you and the children?"

"We're better'n we've been in a long time," responded the widow, stepping in and taking a chair.

She was a little, care-marked body, who did not look as if she had ever seen very good times.

"How's Mr. Carter getting along? I see he's out."

"Father is about as well as he ever will be," answered Susan; "but I fear he will never have much strength of his own;" and her lip quivered.

"You don't tell! I'm right down sorry to hear it. Speaking of your father, puts me in mind of what I came over here to tell you. I will say, I wasn't never in my life much more taken aback than I was this very day. Who, of all folks, do you guess has been to see me?"

"For the Lord's sake tell us to oncest," ejaculated Debby.

"It was my husband's murderer," said the widow, in a low voice.

"I thought so," murmured Susie to herself.

Debby just dropped her knitting-work, and stared at their visitor.

"I'll tell you how it was," continued the latter. "I was out in the door-yard, pickin' up chips to feed the nush for the children's dinner, when I heard a horse a-comin' along the road, and it stopped by our gate. I looked up, with my apron full of chips, and seen the handsomest young gentleman I've set eyes on for years. It never came into my head who it was, for, you know, I'd never seen Mr. Carterer myself though he was to the house every time I was out after the cow, before the trouble happened; and when the trial came off I was sick as a dog, you know."

"Is this Mrs. Sturgiss," says he very softly: and 'It is,' says I, dropping a courtesy—and then he kind of stopped a minute, and colored up, and after that, says he: 'I'm the man who killed your husband, Mrs. Sturgiss;' and at that I dropped all the chips out of

my apron, and stood still all of a tremble. "Of course I know the kind of feeling you must have for me," says he, "and I don't seek to change it. I did not fire at your husband until after he had fired at me. If I had not shot him down he would have murdered me. He was the aggressor; he came to my room to injure and disgrace, if not kill me. But you know all this before. I came to you to-day to say that I am going back to New York to-morrow and I wish to ask your forgiveness, and to say to you that I regret the whole of this sad affair. I wish, also, to present you with a deed of this house, and the fifty acres of land your husband had rented in, and with two hundred dollars in money, to help you and your orphans a little on your way through this hard world. Will you take them?" asked he, so humbly, reaching down the deed and the bag of gold; and I just took 'em, and burst out a cry, and couldn't say a word; and, says he, "God keep you, my poor woman," and rode off. **Before I knew what I was about."**

"Do you hear that, father?" asked Susan, almost joyfully; for Mr. Carter had come up to the door in time to hear the whole story.

As for Daisy, she made no remark; she was thinking mournfully of that one sentence — "going to New York to-morrow."

"To be sure I heard it," was the gruff reply. "And what if I did! Will that give Miss Sturges her husband back? or will it give me the use of my good right arm again? One would think by the way you put on, you would like to tell me I deserved the haul of it. Seems to me it's strangely unnatural for a girl that's been favored as you have, to take part against her own father," and Mr. Carter sat down on the doorstep, and, after wiping his forehead with a red silk handkerchief, covered it on his hand wearily.

"Oh, father, how you talk!" exclaimed Susie, the tears starting. He looked so pale and care-worn, as he sat there, she felt as if she could be for him, in her love and pity.

"Well, you know it's so. Ever since the beginning of this ugly business you've been against me, trying to set up your judgment against mine. I'll tell you now what the doctor told me this morning. He said I'd never have no good use of my arm any more; it would serve me to writ upon myself, perhaps; but as for working, my working days were over. What do you think of that, child? Well, we've got to be taken out from under our feet; we've nothing to stand on but our own, except this little household trash; and if I had the will even for a farm, I couldn't work it. What am I going to do now for victuals to put in your mouths, when I can't grow the wheat, nor chop trees, nor lay corn? I suppose you'll have to look out for yourself, for my comfort; but if I had, the Lord knows I was thinking of you when I done it."

"You break my heart, father," sobbed Susie, stealing to his side on the step, and leaning her head on her shoulder; and there the long strain upon her feelings gave way, and she sobbed and shook with stormy grief.

Little Mrs. Sturgiss cried from sympathy, while Debby joined in with an occasional groan.

"Lord-a-missy! what *will* become of us, sure enough!" was the burden of her spoken thoughts.

By-and-by Susan raised her tear-stained face, shook back her disheveled hair, and spoke in a voice so full of courage and resolution, that all looked up surprised:

"Don't be discouraged, dear father. You have worked for me for seventeen years, and now I will work for you."

"And what will *you* do, Sueie?"

"I haven't had time to think what, yet; but I know I can do something; and I think it will make me happy to work for you. You know I'm a pretty good scholar, father; perhaps I can get up a school among our neighbors. And Aunt Debby can raise vegetables in the garden, and we can hire a man to put in enough grain for our own use, and we can live very well."

"You forget; neither house nor land is ours, till we've paid for 'em," said the farmer, moodily.

Susan's countenance fell, but she would not be discouraged. "Then we must rent a place, that's all. It will be harder for us, but, father, I believe 'the Lord will provide.'"

"Humph!" broke out Aunt Debby; "you're a pretty person to be quotin' Scripser — a girl that's never made a profession."

"Excuse me, aunty for intruding upon your especial privilege," returned Susan, with a gleam of returning mirth.

"Oh, you're quite excusable. I'm glad to see you sensing your dependence on divine grace;" and Debby clasped her knitting-needles — it may have been with joy, but it sounded as if it were with very Christian vexation.

"Well, neighbors, I must be going back to the children; they'll want their supper," said the widow, rising, and wiping her eyes with the corner of her cape. "I feel as if the Lord had provided for me, and I will continue to provide. And I've just got to say that if you want for anythin' while *my* means holds out, I trust you'll let me know."

"Thank you Mrs. Sturgiss," replied Susan, with a bright smile; "as long as Aunt Debby and I keep well, there'll be no need I'm sure. Must you go? Then I'll go with you part of the way, for it's time I was looking up for Sukey."

Although she was only going to the woods after the cow, Susan brushed her disheveled hair, neatness being one of her crowning virtues. Then taking her sun-bonnet in her hand, she walked along beside the widow, through a pleasant footpath, which took a short cut through the woods. When they came to the turn which took Mrs. Sturgiss in the direction of her own home, Susan walked on alone. She scarcely remembered her errand, her mind was so full of the new ideas and emotions crowding into it. The forest path was strangely pleasant — she felt it, although it only made her the more sad. The frost of October had pulled half the leaves from the

trees, scattering them in brilliant profusion along the way. The gorgeous carpets laid down for kings to tread upon are fine in their way; but the rustling carpet of purple, green, crimson and gold, laid down by nature's loving hands, for our little queen of the West, was finer still.

The music which followed her footsteps deepened her reveries; "the arrows of sunset were lodged in the tree-tops bright," and some of them were transfixed in her gold-brown hair.

Harry Gardiner, coming along from the opposite direction saw her some time before she saw him. Raising her eyes, as she heard his steps, he saw that she blushed; but the natural emotion of meeting one who had given them so much trouble would have caused her to blush no more, and he did not presume upon it.

"Miss Carter," he said, as she returned his greeting, "I am coming to see your father this evening.

"I do not think he will like it," answered the young girl, dreading the scene which she was afraid must follow upon the high-tempered bitterness of her parent, more than she did the appearance of rudeness in refusing the young man's visit.

"I am afraid he will not. Yet, when I feel that I wish to do all that is right to reconcile matters between us, I must not fail to try. I have a deep, a very deep interest in making friends with your father, Miss Susan."

She made no reply, standing with downcast eyes, picking off the crimson leaves from a maple-bough in her hand.

"I will only ask you one question before I see your father, Miss Carter; and that is, whether you have any prejudices which would prevent our being friends?"

"Oh, no; I have not, Mr. Gardiner. I would wish to see you and my father reconciled. I am not so blind but that I see he has been in the wrong. But, oh! he has been punished — too harshly;" and again the ready tears, whose fountains had been unsealed that day, rained over her cheeks.

"I have heard that he was likely to lose the use of his right arm almost entirely; is it so?" asked Harry in rather an uncertain voice, for it moved him greatly to see those tears.

"It is too true. He is as helpless as he is poor, Mr. Gardiner." There seemed to be reproach in her sad voice.

"Do not you judge me too severely? You must, you shall forgive me all the pain I have caused you," exclaimed Harry, impetuously. "Whether I am permitted to or not, I shall call on your father to-night. To-morrow I go away, and I can not go without saying what is in my heart."

He turned his hat and walked on. Susan would have forgotten Sidney, but the pretty red cow did not forget her; she came out of the wood, lowing gently, and followed her mistress home. An excited scene, as if she were walking with wings, accompanied Susan, as she performed the humble household duties of the evening, for she felt what the errand of the young man must be — no girl is

blind or deaf to the evidences of love. Yet she did not dare to tell her father who she expected, but sat, with her knitting, before the blazing wood fire, after the work was done, talking with Aunt Dolly about small matters, as if the innocent heart within was not all in the wildest tumult. Shortly after the candle was lighted, she heard the gate close, and a step approaching.

"That sounds like the doctor's walk," said Mr. Carter; "I don't know what he's comin' here any more for, 'less it's to present his bill; and where's the money to come from for *that*, Sister Dolly?"

Trembling in every limb, Susan hastened to open the door, for she did not wish her father to go to it, for fear he would shut it in his visitor's face. When Mr. Carter saw who it was, he rose from his chair. Aunt Dolly gave a slight scream, and buried her blushing face in her hands. The memory of the prison scene was vivid before her; could it be possible he had regretted his refusal of her hand, and had come to signify his intention of accepting it?

"Good-evening, Mr. Carter," said the young man stepping in.

"I have no good evening for you, sir," was the stern reply.

"At least you will let me speak to you a moment on business?"

There was no answer, and he continued: "I hear that the unfortunate accident which *you brought upon yourself*, sir (it was too true, and Harry was not the man to shrink from the truth), has disabled you for life. Although I will not acknowledge the least blame in that sad accident, I regret it none the less keenly. I am sincerely sorry and grieved. I wish to say that you will never be disturbed in the ownership of this farm, nor called upon to return to me any thing I have paid for it. **It is yours.**"

"I refuse to take it," burst forth the sullen squatter; "I will perish of hunger before I will live on any thing your charity may seek to give me. You can't patronize me, sir—no, sir! I'm an honest man; I've earned my bread by the sweat of my brow, and I won't have any airs put on by you."

"O brother! don't be so cru-l-a-d," pleaded Dolly, casting a sighing glance toward the young gentleman. "He means the best; and I'm sure I think him very generous, and so—be—true and forgiving." This was adding fuel to the squatter's wrath.

"Don't think I shall trouble your land only till I get well enough to move off of it, sir. And another thing, if you hadn't known I was powerless to kick you out o' doors, you wouldn't have come to my house after what has passed between us."

The young man grew pale with anger, and turned upon his heel to go, when a glimpse of the white, imploring face of the daughter collected his resentment so much, that he forced himself to speak again: "You may speak as you please, now, Mr. Carter, since you know I will not touch a helpless man. I am sorry that you will not let me be friendly—will not let me assist you, not as a physician, but as a friend—a son," he added with a glance at Susan. "Good-by, Miss Deborah; I shall always remember you. Good-by, Susan," holding out his hand, which she did not refuse; and, as he pressed it, he whispered, "My errand is all undone; but I shall come again."

A new thought crept through the farmer's brain as he saw the lingering look which passed between his daughter and the man he loved. It was a thought which gave him very disagreeable reflections.

Mr. Carter was one of those men, generally kind and good natured, yet of a stubborn make, who, when they have once taken an idea, are very slow to give it up. He was more proud than he was generous — too proud to accept favors from his enemy, and not slow enough to acknowledge his fault if in the wrong. In his mind he knew that he had brought his misfortune on himself, but this knowledge was no bettering him to a temperament like his; he only made him relate the more to the ugly fact. Could it be possible that his daughter dared to love that dishonest young fellow, who had deceived her? Was that all the respect she had for her own father? Concerned to the end of these latter things, he remained in silence the rest of that gloomy evening.

Sarah still sat in her bed to weep half the night, and Debby, as she passed along at her stocking, heaved a sigh with every round, wondering if the young gentleman had not meant "brother" instead of "son," and thinking how very hard it was, at her age, to meet with "another disappointment."

A few days later, when Mr. Carter learned that his doctor's bill had been paid, and the land he occupied deeded to him, and the deal made with Mr. Gardner's lawyer, he showed no signs of relenting; and Sarah, striking his face eagerly, turned from it with a great sigh.

"You may just make up your mind, sister, that we'll move into another State this fall," was his decision.

CHAPTER VI

THE BALL.

THERE was going to be a ball at Giles' Tavern. Hearts may have ached with despair that not even the tender of twenty dollars could squeeze into the Japanese Ball, and hearts may beat high with pride that took part in the sixty-thousand dollar ball to the Prince of Wales — but a regular western break-down is worth twice of either of the above. No heart-burnings at not being invited — no trouble of fear of not knowing who is who, and not much distress about having "nothing to wear." For every girl is bound to go, and enjoy herself, if she has to wear her every-day calico frock, and put a string of red berries around her neck for the ornament; and as for the shyness of the company, if she's asked to dance often enough, by the beau she likes best, she has no other anxiety. And for the pleasure of relishing amusement, there's nothing better to call it forth, than a year's residence in a new country. Work gives a zest to play. Every human being within twenty miles is a neighbor and friend. Everybody borrows and lends — take care of each other in sickness, and help each other when hard pressed.

The ball at Giles' tavern was going to be a splendid affair. The ball-room was a long, low room, running the whole length of the house across the front of the upper story. The walls and ceiling were plastered, but not white-washed. The bravest of the young wolverines of the vicinity, spent a week in getting out evergreens and festooning this state apartment. There was to be a liberal allowance of the best tallow candles, and the tin sockets in which these were to be placed, and which were nailed at regular intervals in a line around the room — two rows over the wainscot's profile, were circled each with a festive wreath. The four windows in front were similarly adorned, and a large garland formed the cornice around the ceiling.

While the young men were busy with the decorations about the hall, the lady and her pretty daughter Kitty, were equally busy in their department. The immense numbers of eggs with which they were to cake, and locket, and frost, and cackle, and jam, and pickle, and vanities, and hearts, and rings, was almost insupportable. If the fowls who chucked so peacefully in the back-yard, could have dreamed of it, or of their own coming doom, they would have slept no more upon their downy roosts.

But oh, oh, what were they to do for mince-pies? Mince-pies!

all would not be a ball without that article of luxury to grace the feast — and apples were yet not grown in the new country. Kitty suggested dried apples, and the result, after all her patient chopping, and flavoring, and baking, was triumphant. "Nobody would't know the difference," Mrs. Giles was sure. Chicken to be stewed, roasted, fried; turkey (wild turkey at that) to be roasted and boiled; venison to be baked in a pie, and baked in a dripping-pan; quails to be roasted and broiled, and — "Oh, mother, I don't see how I'm ever to get dressed and have my share of the dancing and so much to be done at the last minute," quoth Kitty, half crying, in the morning of the day. "Never you mind that," answered the motherly Mrs. Giles, "you've been a good girl and helped me amazingly. Just as soon as the clock strikes four, you can clear out and 'tend to yourself. Debby Carter, though she's a member, and dead opposed to balls, has promised to come over at dark and help me all night." No wonder Kitty flew around in such high spirits. A good, deep fall of snow the previous night, had brought the first sleighing; the house would be sure to be crowded to over-running, and oh, dear! hadn't they got a fiddler all the way from Pontiac, that was said to play better and better, than any man in the state? and hadn't her mother been so pleased with her skill in making trines, and powdering, and sugaring cakes, and her industry in carrying on the work, that she'd surprised her with a wreath of artificial roses with silver leaves, to wear around her head, and a new pair of pink kid slippers? No wonder Kitty's cheeks were red, and her feet light and quick. That was a day of pleasant expectation to every girl within a large circle of miles. Many were the dresses ironed out, the old ornaments looked over, the trunks let down, the new frocks hastily finished. By noon, those who have far to ride, begin to attire themselves in their finery; and by five o'clock, great sleigh loads of merry youths and maidens, are dashing up to the tavern door.

On this merry afternoon, let us look in the front room of Carter's cabin, where Susan, heretofore the belle of every frolic, sits idly by the bright fire. No gay dress is spread out on the bed, and her fingers are busy with no ribbons nor wreaths. She sits, staring into the fire, thinking — sadly thinking. "Sith White has begged and implored of her for days, to do him the favor to allow him to wait upon her to the ball. But she has wavered, and finally decidedly declined."

Poor Susan has seen nothing but trouble for the last two months. Her father, once so cheery and hearty, is fretful and "put-out" about nothing. Given strangely unreasonable, he had insisted on their getting ready for their removal, going without means in the fall of the year, away from all friends who might have aided them, himself unable to work, further into the wilds of the West. Neither Debby's remonstrance nor Susan's pleading, had any influence, and they had actually begun to pack up their goods to go, they knew not where, when Mr. Carter was taken down with a violent attack of fever-and-ague, which positively compelled him to give up his absurd intention for the present.

Sick every other day, and moody all the time, he tried the patience of his devoted child severely. As for Delby, she groaned and murmured; relieving her mind occasionally by giving her brother a good scolding, and making Susie the scape-goat of all her lesser trials.

Susie had wished to begin a little school right away; but her father said they had enough to keep them for the winter, and he wanted her to nurse him up, and he would not hear to her taking the step at present.

In the mean time, the dissatisfaction of the squatters was increasing again; Mr. Gardiner's lawyer had attempted to collect some rent from them, for the lands they occupied; they had refused to pay it; suits were in process; threats and quarrels were abroad; the lawyer had warned his client not to think of showing himself in person at present anywhere in the neighborhood.

All these things weighed upon the heart of Susan. Her father's disturbed mind and poor health; their gloomy prospects for the future, and something else, perhaps, more hopeless than the rest. She did not feel like going to any festivity; and there she sat, that brilliant winter afternoon, hearing musical bells tinkling just outside the door, with the merry shouts and laughter of young people soaring on the air.

She was started from her reverie by hearing their own gate open and close, and some one tapping at the door. She opened it with reluctance, for she surmised that Sam White was coming to renew his entreaties. But there only stood there a little boy, a neighbor's child, who lived near the tavern, holding a note in one mottled hand and rubbing his red nose with the other.

"It's for Miss Susan Carter herself, and nobody else," said the little fellow, "as he give me a sixpence for bringin' it—be you her?"

"Yes, I'm the one it is meant for. Won't you come in and warm yourself?"

"I ain't cold," said the boy, half scornfully, and he bounded off, making snow-balls as he ran, while Susan shut the door and read the note.

We can not tell you its contents, for she threw it in the fire immediately, but a charge of electricity could not have inspired her with any more. Going immediately to that profane lower corner of the bedroom, she unlocked it, and brought forth her mother's sewing-box, the old letters, the silver-stamped card, the little gold watch, the velvet stockings, the faded muslin, the old-fashioned shoes, and the old-fashioned hat, all of which she laid upon the table, and then she went to the kitchen.

"How now, what's this? Mark my word, I never at the last minute. It's just like you, Susan; but I'm telling you, you're not clever to do, for I was afraid you'd had a mortal change of heart. Girls shouldn't throw away their chances quite so free. This is a good fellow, and you'd a sight better marry him than go to school."

teachin' for a livin.' Sakes alive! you don't intend to wear that dress do you? You ought to save that for your own wedding-dress."

"I haven't time to do up my white mull now, and it wouldn't be fit to wear without. I *must* wear this, Aunt Benby."

"Well, I must say your gettin' rather extravagant, considerin' our circumstances. But I s'pose you'd never be young twice, in this world. If you're gone, I must put your father's supper on the table before I start. You know I'm goin' to help Miss Gies. Of course I don't approve of balls, but since it's got to be, I can't refuse to help a neighbor, and there's no girls to be had near or far. I shall hear the music and get some of the supper."

"If you won't eat the devil, you'll drink his broth," observed Mr. Carter, out of the kitchen.

"Oh, mother! what a man you are. Hurry yourself, Susan, and be ready for me to fasten your dress, when I've done settin' the table. I do wonder what I'd better wear myself. I'd put on my green muslin, but I was afraid of grease-spots. I may help to wait on table and it I should, of course I'd wish to appear respectable. I guess I'd put on, and keep on a big apron about the cocker."

It was not an hour after this that the sleigh which was to come for the all-important Benby, who knew so well how to "take hold" and assist Mrs. Gies, was at the door; and she seated herself in it, with a large basket at her feet, designed to hold such choice remnants of the feast as might fall to her in payment of her neighborly services in the time of need.

Perhaps another hour from this, Susan entered the jumpy little cutter which stopped for her, and with a quick start over the wonderful suit dress to keep it from soiling during the ride, and a warm cloak wrapped about her, was carefully tucked in a bundle robe, and rapidly driven to the grand scene of the festivities.

In fifteen minutes thereafter, she was standing at the head of the ball-room, opposite her partner, her little feet pattering the floor expectantly, while the dancers raised their bows, and turned up their ankles for the next contra-dance.

No wonder her cheeks were flushed with pleasure and hope, for she was, without dispute, the prettiest dressed and prettiest looking maiden at the ball. The new frock was of a delicate lace style, embroidered with white flowers, which to a complexion such as hers, doubly fair as hers should have ventured to wear. It fitted her roundly, from waist to perfection. There was a dainty clinging of lace to her bosom and shoulders, and around the waist was a row of small, round, fastened with silver filigree. Her hair was combed in a simple and tasteful style, and fastened with a silver comb. It was smoothed into glossy bands in which was placed, at the left side, a single spray of sunset geranium which had blossomed on yesterday for the occasion in the warm air of the snug kitchen. Around her throat was the string of gold beads; and on her little feet a pair of blue kid slippers, not very far removed from the feet of her friends. This was the extremely elegant and astonishing attire of the wolverine

tella, which caused so many admiring and some envious eyes to be fixed upon her.

Great was the wrath and mortification of 'Siah White, when he beheld this lovely and dazzling vision. Susan Carter, sad, pale, and well-bred, had refused only the evening before, for the seventeenth time, to go to the ball with him, or any one, and here she was belabored with blanches, smiles and happiness; her cheeks like roses, her eyes like stars, standing at the head of the room, ready to lead on the ball with a partner whom no one of the company remembered seeing before. Her partner was a tall, straight young fellow, with a very dark complexion, and long hair tangled about his neck, which, in connection with his decidedly wolverine dress, half-dancer, half-furrier, gave him a rustic appearance. He wore boots of the true country style, and flourished a yellow sack handkerchief. But he danced with a grace and a will. 'Siah White sat morosely through a whole dance, watching the gay pair down the cascade, and up the middle, balance, and round out and down, the heels of his rival coming down exactly true to time with a thump that was rather exciting, and Susan's pretty feet keeping up the measure as sweet as playing a tune.

If Josiah had been a high-minded young man, he would have kept his jealousy and anger to himself; but being of rather a mean and narrow nature, he went about among his fellows, complaining of Susan's treatment, and trying to induce them to help him avenge his wrongs. But they could not afford it. Susan was too beautiful, and danced too well. Every youth who could get her for a partner was only too glad to do so. She accepted as many as she could, only dancing with her own especial escort, to save trouble; and he also made himself agreeable to the girls, Susan recommending him to the maidens of her acquaintance.

The supper was a triumph of art and nature. Two long tables were set in the dining-room, at each of which the ladies were seated on wooden benches, their partners standing behind them with respectful attention, their own appetites being so far from being excited as they have been quoted, and asking a piece for them. Here was peas — green peas — kidney and mutton — pickles and cheese, butter and sugar, and many other good things innumerable and indescribable, all arranged by the tested hands of Kitty Giles — sprigs of spruce were in the corners, garlands of holly twisted about the back of the chairs, which were covered over the top and one side with a piece of purple velvet, and the other with a piece of rich blue velvet, and the floor was covered with the green carpet which covered its own.

The dancing was a success, and every thing passed off well. The very young people were, for the most part, sitting at six in the evening, and keeping it up all night in the morning, to the great amusement of the ladies and the boys, as an excellent thing to preserve appearance. The dances were on a table; and very abundant and very delicious these were. Fowls, wild and tame, venison and birds were in the utmost profusion.

Miss Debby Carter made herself very useful waiting upon table. The green merino and "raving ringlets" dashed everywhere. Susan could see that she was dying to ask her about her unknown escort, but the crowded state of the table allowed of no confidential whispering. When Susan had left her place to her companion, and was waiting, with others, the reappearance of the gentlemen from the feast, Debby poured upon her in a solitary moment.

"How-a-massy, Susan Carter, who is it you've got there, and where did he come from. I heard about him long before supper. I crept down to the kitchen and told me how you'd served her father. I thought maybe it was somebody I knew, on from the first introduction, or something; so I stood up stairs slyly, and stood waitin' you a long time. I must say it's queer you've picked up a horn, nobody knows where, how, or who. What's his name?"

"Want Debby, allow me to present Mr. Taylor to you. Miss Carter, Mr. Taylor."

The stranger had come up, unserved by her, during Debby's speech, and Susan now introduced him, without any chance for explanation. He made a deep bow, but did not speak. As she met those dark, searching eyes, the spinster almost screamed. The next moment, she pressed her hand hard against her heart, and taking a small earnest glance, the look of alarm gave place to one of perplexity, and she remarked:

"Excuse my seeming agitation, Mr. Taylor. You reminded me so much of a very, very dear friend. It's curious — but indeed, I see my mistake."

"Since I resemble your friend so much, p'raps 'twill be in my favor — kinder induce you to think suthin' of me, too," replied the youth.

"Perhaps it will," responded the spinster, with a sigh. "He was a very sweet person, the one you look like, and I was very much attached to him, and him to me."

"If you only danced, Miss Carter, I should be mighty glad of the favor of your company. Wouldn't you now just for my sake?"

"Oh, Mr. Taylor, I'm greatly obliged to you; but I couldn't think of it. I regard it as wrong, and besides I'm a member, and these folks would make remarks, and like as not I'd get church-ed."

"Church-ed? I'd set great store on backing off a Virginny reel with you. Your name has been told; we want a fiddler, and you was once in your young — in the days before you became a professor."

"I expect I'd wear out about as many pairs of slippers as any girl. And, though I say it that shouldn't, it has been said I was a terrible hand to waltz off that Virginny reel. If I then it nobody'd tell my minister when he comes along next sabbath, and if it wasn't raly as wicked as most church-members think — I don't

know — but I might — just this once. But h' I've got on my calf-skin shoes!"

"Never mind that, Miss Carter. I've taken a great notion to dance with you. There! the fiddlers are done supper — let's go up, and get a place at the head o' the heap."

Poor Daisy! she was sorely tempted; that wicked fiddle had "got into her feet," and she felt so flattered by the pressing solicitations of the strange youth — but to the credit of her consistency be it related that she conscientiously refused, declining the invitation to the dining-room, where she and Mrs. Giles now sat down in a snug corner and waited upon themselves to the supper.

The first ball of the season was a grand success. It did not break up until daylight. Susan danced the very last break-down, leaving only a little less room and flesh than in the beginning. Then, tired, joyous, and with the triumph of being the last of the ball, and having been asked every set, she was kissed into the carriage, and driven home in the gray of the morning.

Her father was up, peering out the great bed of his eyes from the covered fire when she went in. He looked as if he had not slept well, and complained of a pain in his arm. A shadow crept over Susan's brightness, which all of the fatigue of the ball could not bring there; she kissed him, and looked at him wistfully, as if her lips trembled to say something which yet they had not the courage to do.

"Go and get a good nap, child," he said. "I'll make the coffee myself this morning."

"Indeed, I'm not sleepy yet. Wait till I get off these fine things, and I'll get the breakfast."

"Fine things, indeed, for a beggar to be wearing," quoth the malicious squatter. "You may have to sell your mother's wool-din'-ness yet, to keep starvation out of the house. I wish we'd stayed to home, where we belonged, and never came to this new country."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LYNCHERS AGAIN.

ABOUT a week after the ball, there began three days of extreme cold weather, when the most the squatters in their snug log cabins could do, was to keep warm, pile on the hickory logs as they burned in the great fireplaces. Those who had a good store of wood already chopped, had nothing to do but bring it in, pile it up, and sit and enjoy the crackling blaze; for it was a season when farmers had no

ble to do, especially these new beginners, who had but little stock to feed and care for. Those who had been too careless to provide for freezing weather, had fingers and toes nipped by the icy air, as they tugged the bars out of the wood, and spat them up in the snowy door-yards.

It was a desperate time at the cabin of Ross Carter. His women had arranged to send him from getting out any firewood at all in the autumn; they had been burning such a deal of wood to be in the best of readiness, Susan and Debby themselves, for the most of it, were busy now the snow lay frozen over all, so that the logs in the yard were all carried up. Some time before the fall is in William had come over and spent a whole day here, and splinting wood for them; but this supply was gone, and Seth was now as "cold as a fish-pot," as he told his sister Jerusalem, and wouldn't have cut a stick of firewood for Susan, to keep her pretty fingers from freezing. Mr. Carter had no money to hire a man; their money was all gone, and they were running up an account at the only grocery in these parts for their coffee and tea, and expecting every year when their next winter would be gone.

"I'll have my arms back on me wuss than ever, if you can't keep up a better fire than this, Susan."

Poor child! she had come in almost frozen, with the few sticks she could dig out of the snow, and this was all her reward — she felt discouraged.

"It's no use, father, trying to get along in this way; I must go to the town and get some way to furnish us with wood. Maybe I can sell my gold beads to Katy Gilst; her father's doing a special business, and he could afford to let her have them. His money they would bring would keep us comfortably until spring."

"They were your mother's, Susan — but you can do as you please."

The young girl tied on her hood, fastened her cloak snugly about her, and, cold as it was, started on her two-mile walk, with the precious necklace clasped in her hands.

She went forth pale and disheartened; she returned bright and happy, despite of the bitter cold. She had not sold the beads; but not a hour had elapsed after her return, before a big load of choice hickory was thrown into the back-yard, and after the teamster had driven away, a young man, the friend of Mr. Taylor, who had escorted Susan to the grocery, and who felt to splinting and peeling up the fuel with the vigor of youth and strength.

"Wood, I must say that man takes a great interest in short acquaintance," remarked Aunt Debby.

"He heard me inquiring for some one to do that job, and, as there was no man about the town who could be spared, he said it was too cold for the people to be without good fires; and, as he was tired of standing around and doing nothing, he would come and take some exercise on our wood-pile," answered Susan, laughing.

"Really, a kind and pleasant fellow. How did you come to pick

up his acquaintance, Susan?" asked her father—people in the woods of the West not being so scrupulous as to letters of introduction, and satisfactory testimonials, as in more civilized communities.

"La!" answered Debby for her, "he took her to the hotel. It seems he was a stopping at the tavern, and he ain't home yet. Well, when he got off, he told Giles he'd like to wait on some pretty girl, and Giles, seein' he was a nice young fellow, sent him to Susan."

"You ought to ask him in to supper when it's ready."

"I will, father."

So Susan, who had been pretending to knit, while her eyes were all the time on the youth who swung his ax so skillfully in the wood, ran out and held a brief conversation with him, while Debby put on an extra plate, and dished up the meal.

"He says he can't stop to-night," said Susan, returning without him; "but maybe he will come in to-morrow, for he's coming back in the morning to finish all that wood."

Susan milked the cow, while Debby washed the dishes.

It was a bright moonlight night, and when the work was "done up," Debby avowed her intention of going over to Mrs. Sturges' to get some yeast-cakes, to start a new pot of yeast, as hers had "run out." Tying her face up in a woollen comforter, drawing a pair of old socks over her shoes, and otherwise defending herself from the frost, she departed, leaving Mr. Carter and Susan sitting by the kitchen fire.

The cheerful, vivid warmth and glow flashing from the large fireplace, warmed the squatter through and through, and seemed to soften his feelings, as well as ease his joints. For a more genial expression came over his face than had been there for some time. Susan, furtively watching him, while her knitting-needles flashed in the ruddy light, at last arose, put aside her work, drew a small cricket to his feet, and seating herself thereon, leaned her head upon his knee.

"Father!" in a low, tremulous voice.

"Well, my dear?"

"Father, you are discouraged and poor. I can see every day that you get thin with this care and worry. You can do much better if you only will, dear father; you can be better off than you have ever been. I have heard of a Harry Gardner. He loves me, father, and wants your consent to marry me."

The silence which followed upon this avowal seemed to the young girl to be that of an hour, yet it was not over a minute before the father spoke:

"Susan Carter, you can choose between me and Mr. Gardner. If you want that scoundrel, go to him! As for him and me—we can never be relations."

"I can not forsake you, father; but I love Mr. Gardner and I think you are very unjust to him, and cruel to me."

"Enough! Things has come to a pretty pass, when a child like you talks to her father about his conduct, and sets up to teach him

the right and the wrong. I tell you, girl, I'd rather be as poor as Job a turkey all my life, than to own the biggest farm in Michigan, and see you married to that fellow."

"Well, father, I have nothing more to say."

The hopeless, quiet tone touched him to the heart, for this only child was the idol of his life; but he had formed a fixed opinion, and he was too obstinate to yield, even for the sake of what he had always made the object of his exertions — Susan's happiness. His sorrow was deeply wounded by the fact that she should have the intelligence to judge and act contrary to his wishes. He was one of those who believed that children should be the slaves of their parents until they were of age — having no mind nor opinions of their own.

"See here, Susan," he said, after a half-hour of silence, "it seems to me there's something curiously alike in that Mr. Taylor that was here this afternoon, and that Gardner. Don't you go to playin' tricks on me. I'll shut you up in the cellar, and keep you there, if you can't be kept away from that rascal without. And let me tell you, it'll be more dangerous than ever for him to come creeping about here. If the neighbors find it out, they'll make sure work this time. If I find out my suspicions are true, you needn't reckon on my keepin' still."

"O father!" Susan resumed her knitting with a look of pain and grave reproach upon her young face.

Presently someone knocked at the door. Mr. Carter went to it, and, as it opened, he saw Josiah White, and two or three others outside; they beckoned to Mr. Carter to come out, and stood whispering for a brief time; then the farmer came in and got his hat and coat.

"It's all up with him, now," he said, stangely; "they've got him."

"Who?" cried Susan, rising to her feet, her eyes dilating, so that her father could not bear their frightened, terrible look.

"That fellow, Gardner," he replied, doggedly, not meeting her gaze; "and I'm goin' to see the fun. They've found out the wolf in the lamb's skin, and they'll strip it off of him pretty certainly, I reckon."

"Father, you'll kill me," screamed the girl, as he went out banging the door behind him.

A short time she stood staring after him; then springing to the door, she saw the men were taking the direction of Giles' tavern. The night was intensely cold and barren; the beams of the full moon reflected from the sparkling surface of the frozen snow, making it nearly as bright as day. Startling her further than at first, she heard a sharp yell and cry; the men were rushing as if afraid they would be overtaken and shot. Pausing not for foot or cloth, Susan started after them; and when Aunt Betty returned shortly after, she found the door wide open, the inmates gone, and the house

"as cold as a barn." Too much taken up with their own excitement to notice the light figure which fled after them, the men passed on.

Half-way between Carter's and the tavern, there was one of those deep ponds or lakes, which dotted the country round about. It was a little back from the roadside, in a large, open piece of ground. As they neared this pond, Susan saw a crowd collected about it, shouting and yelling like so many devils. She comprehended the meaning at once. Her father and his companions turned off the road, and ran to join in the mob. Thoughtless of the consequences to herself, Susan pursued.

The ice over the surface of the pond was frozen to the depth of a foot and a half; but out a rod or two from the shore they had cut a hole, and, standing by the side of it, half a dozen men, their arms tightly pinioned to his side, his face white as the snow itself, but his lips still wreathed with a haughty smile, she saw her father. She thought they intended to drown him at once; whereas, their object was, probably, no more devilish than to give him a dozen good duckings in the bitter cold water, and let him live or die through it, as he saw best. Even as she gazed, they lifted him off his feet. No one had discovered her, though she was standing in the crowd; till, with a wild shriek, she darted past them, and clasped her arms about the form they were handling so roughly. Tight as the drowning clasp of death itself was the hold she held about him, her face in his bosom, and her hair glittering in the moonlight, disheveled by her flight.

"Susan, is this you?"

She did not answer him; she only felt that she should lie with him, or save him by the clinging tenacity of her hold.

"Oh ho!" "whom have we here?" "I vessey!" "Carter's daughter, by Judas!" were a few of the exclamations of the dozen or two of men concerned in this outrage; "ah, ha!" "did you ever?"

"Duck 'em both!" sneered Josiah White and looked at this spectacle, so that what little manhood there was in him was driven out.

"Mr. Carter, what do you say to that?" joined another.

"Take the knife from my pocket and cut the rope," whispered Harry, in Susan's ear.

"Come, Carter, take your daughter off; we can't be kept waiting in this style."

Mr. Carter laid his heavy hand on his child's shoulder; his face was awful with rage and indignation; she waited in his grasp as if he had crushed a flower, but that momentary delay had saved her lover; she had cut the bands which held his arms, and as her father dragged her back, he flung his arms suddenly wide open, and, shaking off the ungoverned bonds which held him, with a rushing whip gave one bound over the hole—away, away over the bounding ice, and sure-footed as a deer. His pursuers were none of them his equals in the race. All started on the run except Mr. Carter. When he saw the prisoner start, he flung Susan from him with a

force that sent her to the ground. They were now alone together, and without saying a word to her, he turned on his heel and strode off in the direction of his cabin. The girl rose from the snow, and turned back to look; but as she reached the threshold, she fell over it headlong. Polly picked her up and put her to bed, spending the night in rubbing her with vinegar, and giving her stimulating drinks.

That same night the widow Sturgis was roused from her rest by a knock at her door. Thinking some of the neighbors were sick, she slipped on her gown, and opening the door, beheld Mr. Garliner standing there, half-perished with cold and fatigue.

"They came pretty near ducking me in the pond this freezing night," he said; "but I have outwitted them again. You won't refuse a fellow-creature a shelter this weather, will you, Mrs. Sturgis?"

"No, you, Mr. Garliner," answered the woman; "come right in to the fire. I haven't any bed to offer you, 'less you'll sleep with the children."

"I don't want a bed. I'll make up the fire, and put on another log stick, and if you've any thing to give me for a pillow, I'll lay down on the hearth and rest a little."

The visitor couldn't rest till she had warmed up some cold coffee, and made him out a piece of pumpkin pie; and then giving him a quilt to wrap up in, she went back to bed in her gown, and she and her guest both slept as peacefully as if the circumstances in which they were placed were not so novel.

The next morning Harry breakfasted in a friendly manner with the little widow, and her six grandchildren, and as soon thereafter as she could get away, Mrs. Sturgis started for the Carters, ostensibly for the purpose of carrying some of her yeast-cakes, which she had promised to Polly, and really to whisper a message in Susan's ear, asking her to come over to the widow's and meet somebody, who wanted to have a talk with her very much. But when the woman arrived at the cabin, she found Susan ill in bed, and quite unable to fulfil the request. The girl's cheeks were flushed with fever; she was nervous, and started at every noise. But after the whisper reached her that Harry Garliner was safe in the widow's house, and wanted to see her, she grew more composed.

"For him it is only a headache, and maybe I can meet him there to-morrow," she whispered.

Neither she nor Polly would betray that there was a fomentation of hips and vinegar over the great bruise in her side, where her runaway brother had dashed her against one of the cakes of ice cut from the pond, for which he now felt heartily grieved and ashamed.

Johnny's sharp eyes. "Sah White, though not remarkable for his powers of observation, by dint of hanging about the tavern, watching every word and motion, and prying into the affairs of the stranger who had rivaled him in Susan's graces, had at length made the important discovery that he was Harry Garliner in disguise. Ghosting over this chance for revenge, he had made the fact known

to the worst of a band of the squatters, who had surprised their enemy, taking him totally unawares, as he was out alone in the night, and were hastening to put their intentions into execution. When the people of the tavern rallied for his defence, their number had been thwarted; but now, it may be supposed, his presence was exhausted, and his orders to his lawyer to exercise the greatest liberality were withdrawn. The squatters had shown a determination to get themselves into trouble; and now, as they had made their bed, so they might lie in it.

As for Harry, he disappeared from that inhospitable country. Susan was confined to her bed for a fortnight, and to the next fortnight longer. Her father made amends for his brutality, by a kindness he had not shown to her the same time. But Debby was cross; and Debby had learned that the man who "had given her the mitten," had offered his hand and heart to that class of a man.

"If you'd a had one spark of pride or proper belief, you'd never allowed him to speak to you, Susan Carter. A man that's disabled your father for life — why I, who am only his sister, wouldn't have him if he'd beg on his knees for me. It's my opinion, too, that he's a regular flirt. You'd best look out. I guess it's well your father drove him off. If you'd know what I know, you'd see: I passed between him and somebody else — a woman — that time he was in prison, you wouldn't set much store by what he promises. Somebody I know give him the mitten, out and out, with the utmost indignity. If you had proper spunk, you wouldn't tuck up with other people's leavin's; but I needn't warn you now; he's gone for good, thank the Lord!" and Debby sighed strangely, and, considering the nature of her rejoicing.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUGAR CAMP.

Two or three times during Susan's sickness, Mrs. Sturges had delivered into her hands, secretly, little missives, which she read and re-read unseen by others, and kept in the bosom of her night gown, until they were fairly worn out. Debby's healing-art, great though it was, had nothing like the power of restoration which lay in these bits of folded paper.

They were equal to any of the charms of magic or medicine.

After her recovery she made an errand to Mrs. Sturges' house, as often as once in a week; and seldom did she go there, but some good woman took down from the highest shelf in her wardrobe a similar missive, which she had laid there for sick-keeping and called for.

"Folks begin to wonder at my gettin' a letter every week," she

remarked, upon one such occasion. "The postmaster to the grocery store, asked me, yesterday, if any of my friends was sick, that they was a writin' so reglar. I didn't hardly know what to say, for I didn't want to tell a lie right out — but you are sick, you know, or was a spell ago, and so I said, 'my friend had been very sick, but was a gettin' better.' "

"You won't have to call for letters much longer, I hope," answered Susan, who had turned her face to the window to conceal the blushes and smiles with which she perceived the one she held in her hand.

Just then, and unexpectedly to Susan who had left her at home, sewing carpet-tacks together, Debby passed the window, looking in with a sharp, inquiring glance. She saw the letter very plainly, and she saw her niece's confusion, as she entered a moment later, but she could get no further glimpse of that which had excited her curiosity, it having been hastily thrust into somebody's bosom. Debby asked to borrow a skein of black thread till she could send to the store; but the thread was only an excuse — she had surmised some motive in the sudden friendship which had sprung up between the little widow and her niece, — besides, 'Siah White had told her Mrs. Sturges was getting letters from the office every week, and he didn't believe they were for her.

Getting the skein of thread, Debby departed; and the next time Susan was away from the house, she took the opportunity of overlooking her private drawer, from which, laid away under the silk dress, she drew a package of love-letters, which it made her heart burn to read.

From that time forward, all unsuspected by their owner, she read every missive that was only laid aside in the package when a new one came to take its place in the folds of Susan's dress-waist. In this manner she knew all the hopes and fears, the wishes and plans of the lovers, keeping her own counsel and betraying them to no one.

Spring came early after the severe winter. The violets began to bloom in March. Before it was time to plow or sow, came the season for making maple-sugar. Frolics occurred on many of the farms. It was considered fine sport by the boys and girls to make sugar, and as a great deal of the comfort of the new country depended on this crop, they were permitted to go into it with all their might and main. Sugar-camples were abundant on some of the hills, and most of the squatters got sugar and molasses enough to last them the year round.

Mr. Carter wouldn't make any, because he was going to move away. But Susan went to a good many frolics. She had recovered her spirits, so that her sweet laugh and bright eyes were welcome wherever she went.

Widow Sturges had a fine maple orchard on her place; she was so kind that her little ones should not go without their share of the "sweets of existence," so she begged a trough here, and a basket

terview, we can forgive the extravagant raptures of the young man. He had sought that of his companion, his arm stole about her waist, and he pressed upon her lips the first timid, thrilling kiss of love.

"Speak, my darling, tell me you are well, and so glad to meet me."

But this the sweet maiden was overwhelmed with joy and confusion, for she could not speak, but only by her looks. Well, kisses are eloquent in their language, and Harry, carried away by his love and high spirits, knew her to his heart's content, and pressed her a dozen or more times upon his lips. At last, however, there was a creaking of the dry leaves on the path. Harry drew his beloved closer, and waited in silence for the steps to pass.

All at once a bright light flashed up on the other side of the fence, revealing a party of six or seven of the boys and girls, headed by John White, who had kindled an instantaneous fire by applying a match to some sticks and pine-cones, which he had soaked in turpentine.

Poor Debby! she had made a confidant of the invillious 'Snah, as to the proposed meeting between his rival and Susan, and that brave youth, urged on by the natural malice of his nature, had thought to entrap, betray, surprise, and mortify the offending pair. The love of practical jokes, or any other outrageous fun, is strong in new settlements, and the young folks had thought it no sport to expose, at 'Snah's bidding, and help throw light on a strictly private matter which should not have concerned them at all.

Profound was the astonishment of 'Snah at the sight which met his gaze. Debby — Debby Carter, ancient spinstress and most pious of women — the very person who had revealed to him the base conspiracy between her niece and this handsome and detestable young gentleman — Miss Deborah Carter herself in the arms of this man.

His heart-broken rival was still more so. The perplexity with which he gazed upon the maiden in his embrace was only equalled by the suddenness with which he withdrew his support, leaving her to face the knocking illumination and the amazed countenances as best she might. In the background of all these surprises stood Susan, moving on tip-toe, just as she was arrested by the light, while glancing toward the stable.

"What!" said Harry, with a slight shudder.

"What?" said 'Snah, with a loud laugh.

James and Deborah broke from the surrounding lads and lasses.

"Where are you, Miss Debby?" spoke up 'Snah, "we'd no idea we was here!"

Overcome by the force of circumstances, Debby burst into tears.

"The fellow is a villain," she shrieked, after a moment spent in tears, and in great distress her words were an emergency, — "a shameless villain, or he would not seize on a helpless woman as was certain" over the stable, and hug and kiss her as hard as he could. I tried to get away (sob) as hard as I could, (sob) but he just squeezed me up, (sob) and kissed me so fast I couldn't boder!"

This exclamation of the weeping maiden was received with yells of applause.

"Come, 'Sith White, you're a head of her'n — you ought to thrash the rest of 'em," called out one of the young men.

"No, I ain't no head of her'n," answered Josiah, looking very much ashamed of himself. "If I hadn't thought that Sam he was after, you wouldn't have caught me here. You're welcome to your fine corn, and good-night to you, Miss Debby."

Before any of the party turned around, Susan had slipped away; escaping unobserved, as the mischievous squatters returned to their work, leaving Debby to stalk home in high indignation, and the next day for an important consultation with the young gentleman.

Full of wrath, Debby went home and read Mr. Carter all the love-letters his unlamented laughter had been receiving.

CHAPTER IX.

A WEDDING AND A TRAGEDY.

"THANK the Lord, we're a-goin' to hear a sermon once again," remarked Debby, the Saturday after the little event related in the last chapter.

There had been no stated preaching through the winter, the community relying for spiritual instruction upon an occasional travelling missionary; and now that one of these proposed to stop in the vicinity for three or four weeks, and hold a series of meetings in the little brown school-house, everybody who loved to keep the Sabbath in the good way of the old homes they had left, were rejoicing.

"I wonder if it will be warm enough for me to wear my white dress," said Susie, going to the door and looking out.

Although it was not yet the first of April, the grass was green, the warm air smelt of the spring it was, and the sky was as blue as Susie's eyes — which is speaking well of the sky.

A white frock, with rural maidenhood, is the one most common, suitable for all occasions — to wear to the party, to the church, to the "saw-vin," the husking-bee, and the ball. Debby thought it a very strange thing of her niece's wish to wear her white robe.

"I hope you won't think of wearin' it with a white dress," after it's laid all winter in the stove and dust," she replied.

"No, indeed, Aunt Debby, that I don't," said Susie, plunged the precious gown into a tub, rolled up her sleeves, displaying her dimpled elbows by the act, got the wash-board, and the hot water, and half an hour thereafter, the dress was spread upon the green grass like a great spider's web, so soft and fine it was.

There was a glow in the young girl's cheek that was not brought

there, even by the heat of the irons as she "dressed up" her dress, that same afternoon. Very carefully she clipped and pulled and smoothed the snowy fabric, very elaborately she straightened and loosened the pinned-out tucks, very daintily she freshened up the throat-lace trimmings. Yet her busy little fingers quivered all the time; and she could not sing at her work, as usual — her heart was too full.

"I don't spend the half-holiday afternoon on that kind of thing," grumbled her aunt. "I presume it will rain, and then you'll have to wear your cloak. There's your father's shirt-dresson to be done up, and his other pair of trousers to be sponged and pressed. As for me, I've got to go to bed, taking care and I scurried to the kitchen. I'm going to ask the minister to stop with us over Sunday night."

The cloak, as fresh, as pure, as any as hats could make it, was laid on the bed, and Susan got her father's waistrobe in order to go to meeting on the morrow. As she ironed his shirt-dresson, she lingered over it bravely, drenching it with tear-drops which fell unnoticed by her busy relative.

That father, so sad, so morose, who had always been so indulgent to her, who had never been harsh before the disagreeable circumstances which had seemed to change his temper so much — who loved her better than his life, now, through all his blind opposition to her true happiness — she was going to desert, to desert! Yet the desertion, she felt certain, would be only for a short period — when he found that she was really married to Harry Gardner, who would treat him as a father and confer upon him confidence for life, she thought he surely would cling to his foolish pretensions.

The next day, the little school-house was crowded to overflowing. Susan, sitting between her father and aunt, though she tried hard to fix her thoughts upon the glowing appeals of the preacher, heard little that he said; and though she prayed devoutly, the heart and head were in a whirl.

After the first services, the people scattered about the grass plot and in the adjoining woods, to eat their luncheon and rest for the afternoon service, as the most of them lived too far away to go home at noon-time. It was as beautiful a spring day as ever shone, warm and clear; the leaves were out on the maples, rustling lightly at the touch of wandering winds. Dobby, ever conspicuous in good offices, carried her basket, well stored with the skilful work of her hands, to the minister. Susan stood near, and at every glance of the good man's eyes, her own would droop, and soft blushes would lit over her face.

"Come, Miss Susan, will thou show me the way to the Willow Swamp?" said the preacher, turning his body for the piece of ginger-bread he took from her hand. "I cannot see the way where to go; and, as she has been so very afflicted, I must see her out."

"You can hardly get there, sir, and I have, before time for afternoon preaching," said Dobby, much pleased that the invitation had not been extended to himself on account of that little chat.

"We will make good time, however," said the minister, and

ing down at his companion; "to-night, Miss Deborah, I shall be glad to accept your kind invitation to stop at your house. Come, child."

With steps that did not seem to touch the ground, the young girl walked by the good man's side through the forest path, until they came to the house of the widow. The whole woman, in her best clothes, and all the children in new suits, crowded about the door, waiting for the expected visitors.

And Susan, with one swift glance, perceived another face at the window, which made her pause for a moment and half draw back.

"Have courage, my daughter," said the preacher, "thou hast persuaded me of the right and propriety of this step thou hast resolved to take. We are all in the presence of our Father in heaven."

They reached the cabin; and only pausing to take off her plain straw bonnet, and fasten a knot of violets which she had gathered by the way, in her bosom, Susan stood up by Harry's side. He was pale with the intensity of his emotions, though his eyes shone with a clear radiance which spoke eloquently to the minister of the truth of his love for the fair young creature, who, in five minutes after their entrance, was his wife.

Mrs. Stargiss wept as she looked at the beautiful couple so romantically married; the minister prayed earnestly for their present and eternal welfare; and then, after one kiss, one clinging gaze, Susan turned back, with her reverent friend, for the meeting. She was to attend the afternoon services, to avert suspicion; then, when Harry was busy getting tea, after the day's exercises, for her honored guest, Susan was to slip out in the direction of Mrs. Stargiss, be met on her way by her husband, who would await her coming with a buggy and swift horse. The dusk of evening would protect them from the observation of acquaintances they might meet; they would ride thirty miles to the nearest large town, where Harry had engaged board for them, leaving the minister who performed the ceremony to break the news of the marriage to her father, and present, at the same time, a petition for their pardon.

"Ain't you going to set the table, while I make the biscuits? seems to me you don't know which end your head's on to-day."

Susan looked out at the golden sun just setting behind the trees. It was the signal.

"I must take off this frock, Debby," she answered; and going into the parlor where her father and the parson sat talking, she brought forth her brown alpaca and attired herself in that.

"Bring me a pail of water, Susan, and be spry."

Susan took the bucket and went out, — she had thrown her shawl and bonnet out of the window, while Debby's head was in the door; — snatched her garments from the press, gave one hurried look as she passed the window by which her father sat, with his back to it, and fled through the garden, over the fence, and was hidden from the house by the trees.

She hurried along, her heart beating like a trip-hammer, expecting every moment to meet *him*. When she came in sight of Mrs. Sturges's cottage, without seeing anything of him she blushed as she blamed herself.

"I am too early," she murmured, turning back, and lingering on the way until she came to the stile near the lower part of her father's garden. Again she went over the path, and this time she went to the widow's door to inquire if Harry had changed his plan or left any word for her.

"No, he had gone out high upon two hours ago, after his horse and traps, which was back a piece in the woods."

It was now twilight when Susan left the widow's and again lingered over the way, expecting every instant when that dear voice would whisper her name, and she should be safe in her husband's arms.

Alas! for Susan, that happy moment came not. Hour after hour she paced the lonely woods. Convinced that something must have happened to detain him, she remained in the path until midnight; and when he did not make his appearance, she felt that they must await for some other opportunity to take their flight.

Yet how could that be effected, when the parson had, ere this, told the whole story to her father? There was nothing to do but to go home, brave his anger, and wait for her husband to come and claim her. Perhaps this, after all, would turn out for the best. Only — only, she suffered such suspense as to the cause of this unaccountable absence.

The lights were burning in her father's house until one o'clock. She went, and sat on the step by the kitchen-door, but she would not go in; and there the gray morning found her, chilled and miserable.

"Soho, my dear! has your husband sent you back so soon?" asked the squatter, as he came out of the door at dawn for chips to kindle the fire.

"Oh, father, something has happened to him, I'm sure. I have not seen him this night. Will you not go and find out, for my sake, father?"

Her pale face struck him to the heart; but his suspicious nature did not allow him to look upon this absence as an accident.

"You need never expect to see him, you little fool. I warned you but you wouldn't listen to your father. 'Tisn't enough for him to come 'breakin' up the fathers, but he must meddle with the daughters."

"I would pledge my life, father, that he is not to blame."

"Oh, of course — of course! that's the way with girls — they '70 be a fine set of fellows of 'em now. My advice to you, girl, is to come in to the house and keep quiet. The more this matter is hushed up, the better 'twould be for you. If it hadn't been for your folly, that fellow would have got his deserts down to the pond last winter. As for Par-

son Brown, if he wasn't a minister, I'd lick him, and I tell him so, last night! Like as not the rascal's got half-a-dozen wives already. What do you know to the contrary?"

How did she, in fact? By a knowledge that was satisfactory to herself, by the evidence of soul to soul — but there was no proof she could place before her father. She could not combat his suspicions, though not a doubt troubled her own breast.

She went into the house, helping Debby prepare the breakfast, as usual. Parson Brown looked grave and uneasy; he began to regret the ease with which he had allowed the young couple to work upon his benighted feelings. But Susan's eye could not follow as it had his. She was nervous and excited; her restless glance told plainly that she was expecting Harry to appear and clear up the mystery — she was **made afraid, but not ashamed.**

The morning passed away without bringing any arrival. The parson had lingered in the hope that when the young husband came, his influence over Mr. Carter would prevent a quarrel. Now he whispered to Susan:

"I will go and make inquiries. No one knows the state of affairs but ourselves and Mrs. Sturgiss. Keep still, until I return."

She obeyed him, remaining at home, when her feet burned to fly through the forest, to the tavern, everywhere in search of tidings. About four o'clock in the afternoon, Parson Brown returned. There was nothing known of Mr. Garkner at the tavern. He had paid his bill the previous day, and told the landlord that he was going to Pontiac that night. A couple of farmers had seen two men, one of whom resembled Garkner, driving off on the south road, in a hurry with a black horse.

"The Lord give thee patience to bear thy cross, my child. I sincerely regret that thou and I wert so deceived. Certainly, he had a specious way with him which would have deceived an angel."

"He has deceived no one — you will find it out some day. He has been wicked. His life has been threatened, you know, and now he is murdered — murdered!" and her fortitude and hopefulness gave way before the despair which rushed over her.

Even Debby forebore to trust the poor girl, so complete was her unhappiness. All the bloom of youth was struck from her face: she would sit for hours, gazing upon the ring she wore, and then start up and wander out into the forest in search of some trace of the one she persisted in believing murdered.

But there came news, after several days, which dispelled this belief. Mr. Garkner's lawyer received a letter from him, directing him to press his suits against the squatters, and all the money he could, conveniently or otherwise, and forward to his address as given in the letter. When the parson heard of this letter, he showed it for the purpose of convincing the trusting girl she had been mistaken.

"If ever he comes in my way again, I swear a revenge which nothing on earth can thwart," muttered the squatter.

The young heart of the girl was changed into a dull, aching thing, which could be neither glad nor sorry.

The farmer still was a more discontented one than ever. Mr. Carter was now determined to carry out his plan of removing to another State, in a portion of the State he was in. They were getting poorer every day; but as he secretly hoped that a change would revive his daughter's health and spirits.

When they were asked, or what they should do for a living were asked, they were usually silent. He was going to keep on the road, and was sometimes of getting into business somewhere. Just now he was going to help them pack up. He entered himself as a journeyman, and what business he was to conjecture.

The farmer then told the squatter's family and all their worldly goods which was left over, after disposing of a part to furnish them with a little ready money. The fine canvass which had sheltered them on their long journey from the East, was again stretched over the hickory hoops which arched the front of the wagon. A small red chest, which formed a seat for Sassy, was filled with cold boiled pork and beef, bread and crackers, doughnuts and apples, milk, sugar and cheese, ground coffee, etc., while the blankets, the cow, and a few tin dishes were packed conveniently for use; and on a fine morning, with the neighbors standing about, bidding them a reluctant farewell, with the cow tied behind the wagon, and the farmer walking placidly in the front, the family set dolefully out on their journey.

The journey seemed of their slow march were made like hours to the relatives to Sassy. Sometimes they got out of the wagon and walked up long hills. At noon they rested in some convenient spot and ate their lunch, taking a drink of water from the running stream. At night, if any house was in sight, they stopped at it, paying for their beds, and cooking their meals; but if not, they camped by the roadside, building a fire to keep them warm, and taking such rest as they could obtain in the shelter of the wagon. Sassy gave them what little milk she could keep upon the weary journey. Sassy always called the animal herself who seemed more a friend to her than her own mother — for was not that cow, with her great, red, goggle-like eyes, gazing at her through the fence with dumb affection, that terrible evening what she waited in the forest for one who never came?

Smoking his pipe from morning till night, the farmer passed the never-ending road, saying little to any one. Debby kept seeking to pass away the time, cried, and whistled, or was unable, as the mood took her; and Sassy sat with felled hands, staring at the way with vacant eyes.

The hard side of life seemed spread for these people to walk upon. Debby mourned in secret over her chances for matrimony, which seemed to her to diminish, in exact ratio with the miles they traveled away from a populous community.

"I'm glad your mother has'nt lived to see such days as these," Mr. Carter remarked, one terrible, stormy night, as the three sat huddled in the wagon, unable to sleep for the wild tumult of the elements.

"Oh, father, you brought it on yourself," cried Susan, grieved to desperation by their misery.

"I didn't! never dare up to me again in that way!" and the obstinate man shook her roughly by the shoulder. "It's all brought on us by a disobedient child. You needn't expect to prosper, Susan Carter, till you make up your mind to obey your parents."

"A thankless and disobedient child will never receive my blessing," cried in Debby. "She took that from her mother's side of the family — that obstinate streak in her — for I'm sure she never got it from one of the Carters. The Carters are known for their meekness and piety. O Lord! how it does grieve me! The Carters have been a lively people from generation to generation. I reckon there never was such a thing as a runaway marriage took place in the family before. As for me, I'd stay unmarried till I was a hundred years old, before I'd fly in my father's face, if I had a father, and pick up a husband against his will. It's astonishing how anxious young folks are to get married now-a-days. If I'd been as eager as some, I should'nt have refused as many as I have. There was that Zekiel —"

Debby's reminiscence of her past conquest was overwhelmed by a vivid flash and an instantaneous crash, and the whole party, once frightened by the jar of the wagon, caused by some of the branches of a tree, splintered by lightning, falling upon the back part of it. It was an awful night. During the pauses of the tempest, they could hear the creep and hiss of snakes, and the devil's rattle of the wind dreaded of them all. They dared not leave the shelter of their wagon an instant, though they expected momentarily the fall of some neighboring tree upon it, and they supposed their horses would be bitten by the venomous reptiles, and they felt helpless upon the road.

Debby never prayed before as she prayed that night; and even Mr. Carter, stubborn and self-reliant as he was, and once opposed to the words of prayer, gave an "amen!" to her petitions for safety. Once, in that wild storm, a horse and buggy dashed by them; they saw it an instant by the lightning's glare, speeding on as if no power of the elements could detain the two men, whose figures stood out one second against the lurid sky.

CHAPTER X

THE FOREST INN

"Did you notice that girl that waited on table to-night, Bill?"

"Can't say as I did, in particular; handsome, wasn't she?"

"She was more than handsome, Bill; something in her face has put me out of conceit with myself. I wish we had better work on hand than making power looms with seven coats on."

"Oh, but now I've got in one of your sentimental fits, Jim."

The rain beat wildly on the one small window, and on the roof which was just above their heads; the wind roared around the corner of the house, swinging the little sign of the Black Bear tavern with a harsh creaking; the pine-trees all about whistled and shrieked; the two travellers who sat in their little garret bedroom, with the sashes almost touching their heads, were fortunate in escaping the storm in so comfortable a shelter as this. They had dried themselves by a blazing fire in the bar-room below, warmed themselves with a glass of liquor, and partaken of a good supper in the kitchen; now they had retired to a private apartment, which, close and bare as it was of all furniture except a rude bed, promised to answer their purpose very well. The trunk, which had been strapped on behind the buggy in which they had arrived at their destination, they had carried up with them. Before they opened this, and took from it the implements of their trade, one of them having his overcoat over a crack in the door, and stuck his long knife into the latch, to serve as a bolt. They looked toward the little unobscured window, framed of four panes of glass; but there were no witnesses in the wet branches which dashed up and down, almost against the sash, whose testimony could betray them.

It is no wonder they were drowsy to breakfast the next morning, for it was long after midnight before the dim light which shined from their room was put out. The family who kept the Black Bear had partaken of the morning meal, and the table was re-arranged for the two guests, at present the only strangers at the inn.

"This don't look much like the grub we've been getting lately," remarked the elder of the two, with a satisfied expression; and he drew the carving-knife through a nicely baked slice of ham.

There was nothing but fried ham and eggs, corn-cake, and honey upon the table; but these were neatly arranged and properly cooked, while the coffee served to them was excellent, with cream to season it.

"Susan, ask the gentlemen if they'll have another hot cake?"

It was nobody but Debby who said this, jolting the cover of the lake-kettle, and revealing a relay of Johnny the Cook in a turn.

"If it's equal to the one that's gone before, we shall accept," answered the same person who had spoken first; the younger one was improving every opportunity of admiring the cook, who looked about as much at home in the place she filled, as a rose in a garden. **¶ 11.**

"Try it and judge for yourself," returned Debby, bringing the lake to the table herself with a satisfied look.

Debby took to the calling of husbandly naturally — all she regretted was, that her talents were wasted in so narrow a sphere. If she had been mistress of Giles' tavern, she would have been content; but the Black Bear was a smaller house, in a still wilder and more remote region, whose stream of custom sometimes flowed very thin, even to drying up entirely; but which afforded to Mr. Carter, if that is he was, the only means of living he could at present attain.

Three months ago, the Carters had drove up to the lonely inn, with the provisions in the blue chest exhausted, and the prospects of a settlement as far away as ever; had found the owners of the house anxious to give it up and get away; and had closed a bargain with them before retiring to rest, by which, in exchange for the horse and wagon, all the furniture and stock of the house was to be theirs. The stock consisted of a barrel of whisky, a couple of brandy, some corn meal and beans, and a few groceries; the furniture comprised a few benches and a bar; in the one sitting-room, a long table and a dozen chairs; kettles and dishes in the kitchen, and four meager beds in as many little rooms dotted off in the attic. Even this barren and once filthy place put on an air of comfort and neatness, if not refinement, under the sway of neat and nice. The white flannel curtains which had hung over their windows in their old home, were put up in the kitchen, which was dining room, sitting-room, and all to them, the sole room apartment on the ground floor being simply a bar room and lounging place. Debby's strong arm kept the floor white, and the dishes shining. There was always a nicely spread linen cloth on the table, and the plain provisions were well-cooked.

Even in these three months, the reputation of the Black Bear had grown so, that people would press on late into the evening, or stop early in the afternoon, for the sake of passing the night at it.

The constant glances of the younger of the two travellers annoyed Sam. He seemed somewhere between twenty-five and thirty, spoke well, and dressed well; and would have been handsome, but his expression been as good as his features. He had the air of a restless and dissipated man, while his companion looked cool, calm, and reserved.

She was glad when they had finished their breakfast, and drove out into the open air. The wild storm of the previous night had left the morning cool and fresh. And well Sam remembered what day it was, though none of the rest knew what recollections it had for her.

it was the anniversary of the day upon which she had first met Harry Garliner at the camp-meeting. Only one little year; yet, how all the world was changed to her!

"Have you fed our horse, yet, Carter? — let's go, and look at him."

The three men strolled by the kitchen-door on their way to the stable, a long, low, open affair, which answered in place of a stable. Susan was crunching some corn-bread, and, throwing it to the chickens in the yard.

"It's a fine animal really," she heard her father remark.

Looking up mechanically, her attention was arrested by the horse, — a jet-black, spirited animal, with a star in his forehead, and two white fore feet; all the rest of his coat as black and glossy as a raven's. She knew him in a minute — he was Harry's horse. Her heart gave one great leap, then fluttered like a wounded bird. Here was a clue; if she knew upon it suddenly or perceptibly to others, she might break it. She had heard the strangers say that they had been here when would keep them at the house two or three weeks. In that time she could certainly learn if that horse was purchased from Mr. Garliner, when, and where. Her next discovery was that the buggy was also the same used by Harry twice, on his visits to Mrs. Sturges. She remembered the painting upon the panel — a pointer-hog, with a partridge in his mouth.

Whether these things had been purchased; whether these persons were friends of his; whether they had been stolen, and he the victim of some outrage, were conjectures which naturally arose. As she looked at the men, contrasting them with Harry, she would not believe they could be his friends; and yet, if they were not — oh, how black were the suspicions which beset her!

In the course of the forenoon, taking care to choose a time when they were out of the house, she went to put their room in order. With eyes sharpened by what she had already seen, she observed closely all the articles they had left lying about. Out of the overcoat which was left hanging from the rack, the corner of a handkerchief protruded; she may rise and tell her to lay it forth — in a hand which she knew so well, she found marked the letters "H. G." And her long-suffering self-control gave way as she gazed, like one fascinated, upon the familiar characters. Perhaps that was the very handkerchief he had once told her of, with tender fear that she would take cold, that night on which they had appointed the time and place of their wedding. It had been torn out by him — was his! O how she longed to grasp it, to kiss it, to press it to her heart, to hold her face in it with quivering, stilled lips. As she stood in front of the door, one of the strangers entered the room to get a book; it was "H. G." — the younger of the two.

"May I see your book?" he asked, and he removed her hands from the book.

She started as if she were stung; he did not notice whose handkerchief she held, but he felt the haughty anger of her look.

"Pardon me, Miss Carter; I had no right to speak to you. Do not fear that I shall be rude to you."

"I am not afraid; I have a father."

"And if you had not, it would be all the same. Indeed, I was sincerely sorry for you; you must be so lonely and so out of place here. I was thinking about it before I came in."

His manner grew so respectful, that she had nothing to reply, but she hurried from the room without reply, taking with her the precious handkerchief.

The family and their guests dined and supped together. In the early part of the evening Mr. Cross lingered in the kitchen, making himself agreeable to Leahy. He was an interesting talker, but ignorant of the world, and won the favorable regards of the other lady by differential attentions, while his eyes were constantly upon Susan. She could not but be aware of this, and it made her very uneasy, though there was nothing offensive in his regard.

Susan was hardly conscious how fascinating her beauty was; she thought of herself as a pale, sad, withdrawn creature, for whom the world had lost its brightness; and she tried to tell to others she was an unmarried woman, very beautiful and very pleasing.

Once, looking up from her sewing, she met his full gaze, which was so earnest, so undiminished, that she was surprised.

"You remind me of my only sister," he said, as if to apologize. "She was just as young and fair as you when I saw her last, and as pure — too pure to associate with me. I've been a wild fellow Miss Carter, yet I had a good mother and sister."

He sighed deeply. Susan, ever gentle and Christian in her disposition, was sorry for him. She saw that he had been wild as he said — his face bore the traces of bad deeds — but she thought he might yet reform, and become the pride of the sister whom he praised. Hitherto she had remained silent, making her sewing an excuse for not joining in the conversation; now she took an occasional friendly remark, for which the young man seemed grateful. While the upper current of social intercourse flowed sweetly on, there was constantly in her mind an under current of sorrow, as she were ready to say to his kind to a person who had taken part in the robbery and murder of her husband.

While it was yet only the strangers retired to their rooms. When Susan and Leahy went out to their room at home, the light shone through the crevice at the bottom.

Susan lay awake many hours that night. The room, surrounded by darkness and cold, was filled by the soft and pleasant light, and the sound of their voices. She could not but be conscious that they were up nearly all night — a very long watch, and, after the house was very quiet, the muffled creak of wheels. No ear too close strained for the purpose could have detected these sounds.

Every day and night there was the same expectation; the door pleasant and polite, and the younger sister's smile in every look and motion of the landlord's daughter, that the whole house took note of it.

The surprised severity of her look rebuked him, and at the same time made him angry — was she always to go on prying around the neck of that worthless Gardiner?

She was very much startled by her discovery. She dared not tell them, even to her father, at present, for fear of the consequences. It was not likely she could find long-protected victims when a hungry family is standing in their way; if they knew they were suspected they would be sure to take care of their own interests at all events. Her father had pistols and bowie-knives in profusion, while her poor old mother had but a single rifle.

With great discretion, she resolved upon keeping their secret, and this was done when there should be a party of our guests at the house. There were no officers of the law immediately around in that quarter, and, by going, we might be detected by going after it, but her father had no conveyance.

[illegible][illegible]

nights, while Susan, lying by her side and next to the wall, kept awake to listen and observe.

One night she overheard them mention Harry's name. The blood rushed up into her head, beating so loudly in her ears, for a time she heard nothing, though every nerve was strained to listen.

"I've always felt sorry about it," were the words she next heard, spoken by Jim Cross.

"Pshaw! you're too chicken-hearted to make a good rival," jeered the other. "I've sometimes thought we'd better put you out of the gang."

"I wish to heaven I were out of it, Bill; I do, indeed — and leading an honest life. I've about made up my mind to go out. You needn't look black — I shan't peach, under any circumstances."

"Of course you won't if you want to live and enjoy the society of your friends. I didn't think a girl could make such a fool of you, Jim."

"She isn't a girl, she's an angel. I can't stand the look of those eyes. Every bad thing I ever did seems to rise before me."

"She's confounded pretty, that's a fact. But I don't see why that need to make a Puritan of you."

"Because I love her and respect her. She reminds me of my own sweet sister. If I thought she would love me, would be mine, I would try hard to be what I used to be."

"Oh, bosh! tend to your die, Jim."

They worked in silence for some moments. The betrayal of the young man's feelings, which she had heard, hardly impressed her at all, so utter was the anxiety with which she wanted to hear some farther mention of her husband. It seemed as if her heart would wrench itself apart.

"I can not endure this another day," she thought. "I will go to that man to-morrow. He says he loves me. I will throw myself upon his pity — he must, he shall tell me what he has done to Harry."

"He fought like a tiger," remarked Jim, presently, as if his mind were haunted with the idea.

"Who? oh, Gardiner — yes! but four to one was too many. I'd heerd he had fight in him."

"There ain't more than two nights' work on hand, now," was he next sentence. "I hope the fellows will be up to them."

"I don't feel in much of a hurry," said Jim.

"If the girl will have you, maybe we'd better leave you here to keep tavern for us. This would make us good inn-keepers."

"So it would," replied Jim. "If I can screw my courage to the sticking-point, I'll ask her to-morrow."

Susan listened in vain for farther remarks. Sleep and rest came to her, even to the guilty consciousness, but not to her. More weary than when she lay down, she rose the next morning. The flush on her cheek and glitter in her eye, were those of fever and nervous excitement.

"You look like yourself agin, Susan; I hain't seen your cheeks so red in a long time," Mr. Carter remarked, at the breakfast-table.

"She's healthy enough if she'd only think so," said Dolly, charitably.

After breakfast, Jim Cross and Mr. Carter sat on the fence by the well, talking together for over an hour. Susan, busy with her work, observed them, dreading what she knew was to come, yet so terribly anxious to learn the fate of her husband, that the morning seemed a year long. After the two men separated, Jim eventually found an opportunity of speaking to her alone; her father told her after dinner, to go to the blackberry patch, and pick some berries for tea. The patch was within sight and hearing of the house, so she was not afraid. Taking a little tin bucket, she set forth, and before she had passed the stile, Cross joined her, asking permission to assist her. For awhile they gathered the precious fruit in silence; the full promise to be full before they should come to an understanding.

"Miss Carter — Susan — I swear I love you to distraction."

This avowal burst forth without any preliminary speeches. She looked up full into his face, which was white, and his eyes burning — his gaze, fiery with doubt and passion, sank before her piercing look, but he hurried on in agitated tones:

"I love you, desperately. You are too good for me, I know. But if you will marry me, I will make a better man. You shall see fine things. I've got money. You need not work, nor stay in this miserable place. I will dress you in silks and satins, and do whatever you wish me. Come, say yes, now! Your father has given his consent."

"Has my father given his consent, Mr. Cross?"

"He has, and, seemed pleased with the idea. No wonder at that — he can't marry his girl off any day in this strange place. I've promised to provide for him as long as he lives."

"But he not tell you that I am a married woman?"

"Would you are you in earnest? you — you are fooling me, to prevent giving me an up-and-down answer."

"I am not fooling with you at all, Mr. Cross. God knows I am in the humor to tell. I have been married over three months, but I have never seen my husband since I parted from him in the presence of the minister, five minutes after the ceremony. Mr. Cross — kneeling before him, and kneeling before him — 'you know where he is, whether he is dead or alive. Tell me, for my sake, to save me from any or sundry, tell me what did you do to Harry Gardner?'"

"Gardner!" muttered he, flinching back from her, as he heard the name.

"Yes! yes! yes! tell me what you have done with him."

"So he was your husband, was he? and he was going to run away with a slave that night we trapped him? no wonder he fought like a panther, — I'd have done the same."

"Tell me!" implored Susan, her hands clasped and stretched forth toward him.

"My poor girl, I'm afraid you're a willow as well as a bride."

She did not scream nor faint — she seemed to breathe and to think.

"Don't look at me so," muttered the young man; "I don't want it. I had no hand in the matter, though I had in the robbery. I tried to coax him from using violence. I did, indeed. I tried to give him! — You see, I was a new hand, and I couldn't bear the sight of blood" — her white look impelled him on to speak more fully, and he must tell all to that stricken woman kneeling there. "You see there's most always some of us hanging about these places, on the lookout for game, and some of us hunt out that kind of prey, even getting considerable money together. We'd made it up to that time, when some men came to us with another proposition. Some of us were known to some of the squatters — they knew we wouldn't stop at any little disagreeable job, and they told us about that man, and they'd made up their minds to clear him out of the State. They offered us a good sum of money, besides all we could get from him, if we'd quietly kidnap him, and convey him somewhere, where he wouldn't trouble them any more. Come to think, your own father was one of the men. It's the same name, and I'm sure, he must be the man, though I never thought of it before, as I saw him but once in the evening. Of course they didn't ask us to kill him, cut him out, but they showed very plain they shouldn't care if we did. Our plan was to gag him and carry him off where he wasn't known, nor we either, accuse him of stealing the horse and carry we took from him, swear him through court, and get him in the penitentiary. I was the best educated of the whole party, and had a pretty good practice in forgery — for that was the first sin I took in crime, which drove me from home and broke my mother's heart — and I was to make a still better thing of it, by getting his papers, and imitating his writing, to draw on his lawyer for funds, as long as we could carry on the game without detection. But when we seized and gagged him, that evening, though there was four of us, he made such a fight, we had as much as we could do to subdue him, and Bill Ellis, the one that's with me now, hit him a blow over the head with a basket of wood he'd picked up. The fellow began to howl under him, only to quiet him a little, but he kept on howling all night. As we did not want to leave him there for the night, to get up with us, we put him in the baggy, and two of us got on, and the other two took horses, and we drove nearly all night, and just before morning dumped him out in a lonely piece of woods, and there, I'm sure, he lies yet."

Still those glittering eyes and that icy face were upturned, motionless. He could not endure the wretched scene, and turned away quickly:

"It's him on my conscience like a stone ever since. I was opposed to it, and I felt bad about it. Don't blame me, Susan — don't. Ever since I took that terrible ride with that corpse, I've been sworn

to quit the gang, as soon as I could get out of it. I wasn't made for such things. I've a good mother, and sister, just such another angel as yourself. I want to get away, but I'm afraid of the fellows. I'm in their power, and they're afraid I'll peach if I leave them. But if you will have me, if you'll forgive the past, and try to learn to like me, I'll dare every thing, and quit, and lead an honest life."

"Like you — and my father, he saw me suffer, but did not re-
buke."

She arose and walked home; he did not dare to follow her, just then.

"What's the matter?" asked Debby, startled by the look of the girl's face.

"Nothing."

"Oh, Sam, didn't you like your new beau?"

"It's rather soon for a widow to be choosing again, father."

How strange she talked, and how strange she looked. Mr. Carter and Debby exchanged anxious glances. She passed them by, going up to her room, where she laid herself upon the bed, and realized nothing more for many hours. Debby came up to look at her, but went back again, saying she was asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE.

"Come, Susan, are you sick? If you ain't, get up and help me — the house is full of folks, — and chickens to be pickled, and doughnuts fried, and lots to be done."

"I'm not sick," and Susan roused herself from the dull trance in which she had lain for several hours.

It was evening, and blowing up for a rain. She went down and found the bar-room full of company. They were drinking, laughing, singing, washing themselves, swearing, and making plenty of chatter. Her father was out, attending to their horses. Debby was busy in the kitchen, into which she would not allow the travelers to enter, until the meal was ready.

"They're the friends our bearers expected," said she, "and they're most starved, and want a good supper. There's ten of them. They've bought lots of horses, and they're going on to buy more."

"Say old lady, hurry up your grub," shouted one of them, putting his head in the door.

"I'll tend to your own affairs, and wait till I ask you," retorted Debby, loudly.

The night was dim, but not always dark. Ragged clouds fled over the sky, now concealing, now revealing, the pale face of the half-filled moon. Occasionally great drops of rain would patter down, and the wind surged in the pine-trees, making a tumult very welcome to the girl, as it drowned the noise of the horses' steps, as she led him north to the road with only a bridle on him, mounted him bare-backed, and walked him softly away until she was out of hearing of the house.

"Now, Prince, do your best," she murmured, patting Lim on the neck, and uttering a low cry, which sent him bounding off at full speed. The branches of the trees went above her over the road, casting shadows and changing shadows on the narrow way. At some moments every thing would be shrouded in darkness. — again the moon would find her, gazing down through the tossing foliage, at the maiden fleeing on her wild errand. She abated nothing of her speed in the darkest moments, trusting to the sagacity of the noble animal that bore her.

She had ridden perhaps two miles, when she heard some one in pursuit, — the gallop of a single horse, pressing on, but a short distance behind. She urged her steed to his utmost speed; the tramp came nearer, she was descending a long, rambling hill, when the rider behind her seemed but a few paces from her. As she reached the bottom of the hill, she gave one backward glance, and discovered, in the sudden brilliancy of the moon, the rider to be Jim Cross.

"Stop!" he shouted, "or I will shoot."

She only pressed forward the more urgently.

He gained upon her — he could almost lay his hand upon her bridle-rein.

"Susan, stop! you are going to betray us. You proceed at your own peril."

He fell behind, but soon regained his loss.

"Girl, do you dare? it will be no light matter for you to bring down the vengeance of the league. They will never — let you — rest."

In vain did he urge his panting horse and shout out brief sentences of threat and revenge. Susan had passed out of the limits of mortal fear. "Rest!" — she expected no rest in this world — they had already taken that from her. "Peril!" — let the peril be what it list, — it would be well, — she should the sooner be with him, — they had torn from her.

On and on they flew through the wild forest, each making their utmost effort. The pursuer began to flag, — the powerful horse which Susan rode, had few rivals in speed and endurance, — and he fell far behind, after the other dropped far behind.

She came upon elevated hills lying on either side of the road, large, silent and dark, and soon was in the heart of the little settlement. She never had been in the place before, but she rode up to the largest of the cluster of houses, and knocked on the door with

her riding-whip. She expected to be overtaken, and perhaps shot. Just as the sleepy inmates were rousing themselves to open the door, her pursuer dashed past her —

“Farewell, Susan,” he cried, half-checking his horse. “You’re a gallant girl,— I’ll give you credit for it. And since you’re bound to betray my friends, I’m bound to leave ’em to their fate. You’ll have a desperate fight, though. I’ve wanted to break away from them this long time. If you ever hear from me again, it will be in a better business!”— and on he fled, just as a man came out, wondering stupidly at the sight of a woman on horseback, at that hour of the night.

“Where does the sheriff live?”

“The sheriff? what? — why? — has any one been killed or any thing?”

“I need his services,— where is he?”

“He’s over thar’ in the third house.”

She went and roused up that household, followed by her informant, eager to learn the news. The sheriff came out scratching his head.

“I am the daughter of the man who keeps the Black Bear. There’s a desperate set of counterfeiters and murderers stopping there to-night. I felt it my duty to let you know. Can you summon force enough to capture them?”

“Hang the rascals! my fingers has itched to get hold of ’em this year past,” said the sheriff. “How many is there?”

“A dozen — all armed.”

“I’m ’fraid ’twill be a tight time, what do you say Hener?”

“Good fun,— I’m in,”

“Wall, help me to rouse the boys, then.”

“Don’t lose any time,” said Susan. “if we can gain the house without arousing them, we won’t have much trouble. You can surprise them, asleep, and disarm them.”

“Good lord, what’ll we do with ’em when we get ’em — thar’ ain’t a buildin’ secure enough to fasten up such rascals.”

“You must march them off to the next county, and lodge them there. Or give them the benefit of lynch-law at once. I tell you they are dangerous men, murderers as well as robbers.”

“My sakes! what a girl!” ejaculated the sheriff, abashingly.

“If the boys have half her spunk, they’ll secure every rascal of ’em,” said his companion.

In a few minutes the whole settlement was aroused. Every one who felt a disposition to assist the sheriff in his duty, armed himself with gun and knife, mounted his horse, and formed into rank. There were twenty-five in the posse.

They rode back rapidly to the Black Bear. It was that day, not after midnight, when summer is profoundest, that they reached the place. Dismounting in the forest, a quarter of a mile distant, they left their horses and stole forward silently to the inn. Susan entered the back door, and after arousing her father and aunt, explained to

them the character of their guests, and that the sheriff was there to arrest the party. She did not stop to say that she had been the means of bringing them there. In profound silence, the men took their places, two at each door and window, to prevent escape, while the others entered within. The women thought best not to be mixed up in the melee, and retreated to the rear of the shed, where they awaited the result. They heard oaths and shouts, windows crashed, and one or two shots fired. One fellow bounded over the fence close beside them, followed by a parting shot, and three or four men; but he struck into the woods and made his escape. All the rest were captured and secured; not without many bruises, and a few slight wounds. A sullen, wicked-looking set, after they found themselves distressed and overpowered.

When their captors came across the trunk full of counterfeit dollars, and other evidences of the character of their prisoners, they were for horsewhipping the whole lot, before delivering them over to the more tardy justice of the law. The bar-room was turned into an extempore jail, where the rascals were kept until morning.

Debby and Susan prepared a good breakfast for the sheriff and his aids, while Mr. Carter served the prisoners with bread and coffee. For the whole expense of the entertainment of both parties he had his pay in property left on his hands. The horse and buggy of the absent but Jim fell into his possession.

But Edna suspected that Susan had been the means of entrapping them. He gave her glances full of hateful meaning when she chanced to look at him, which betrayed what it was in his heart to do, should he ever gain the opportunity.

After breakfast, the prisoners, bound together with ropes, so as to prevent sudden escapades, and escorted by nearly the whole county, were marched off to the nearest jail which could be found to hold them — a march of nearly twenty miles, where we may leave them with the remark that they were afterward tried and convicted of various crimes, and sent to the penitentiary, where the most of them worked out their punishment. A general feeling of joy pervaded all that part of the State, to think so many of the rascals who stole their property and flooded the county with counterfeit coin, had at length met their deserts.

Great was the admiration testified by the rough settlers for the courage of the landlord's pretty daughter, who had performed so prominently in this important arrest. Her daring adventure gave her fame over them, and the Black Bear rose into notice.

Debby took to reading in her spare moments, the "Mysteries of Utopia," and "The Three Spaniards," which chanced to be among some of the property left by the prisoners. — and, upon this narrative, so good, so true, and imaginative, daily expecting some hero to rise before her, and claim her for his own, from among the desperadoes with which a new State is usually tormented. Of course, she also dreamed that the desperado, under her magic influence would be transformed into a good, orthodox, Christian man.

CHAPTER XII.

'SIAH WHITE'S ERRAND.

I DON'T believe Susan will live through the winter, brother."

"I don't believe she will, Debby, — she's clear heart-broken. I'd give the hull world if I could on to what I've done about separatin' her and him. They loved each other, no mistake. I'd no right to let my own angry feelings step in between 'em. I used to feel so ugly toward him, every time my arm gave me a twitch, — I just set up to be as contrary as I could. Now he's dead and gone, I see things in a different light. If I'd have been as generous-minded as he was, there never would have been any trouble. But I wouldn't straighten matters when I could."

"He was altogether the likeliest man I ever saw," said Debby, with a deep sigh. "I durstn't say so once, in your presence, brother."

"I know it. I'm free to say I did wrong. But that won't mender matters now. My only chail is a dying by inches before my eyes. Sometimes she looks to me like her mother's ghost, — my dead wife seems to rise up out of her grave to reproach me for my treatment of her child."

"Don't, brother, don't say so."

"It's true. And sometimes I see young Gardiner's ghost. Of course, I had no hand in murderin' him; but, if me and others hadn't set them villains on, he would never have met with that untimely end. I've heard Susan say he had a mother and sisters on East. How they must be looking, and wondering, and fearing! I tell you, Debby, I'm a miserable man."

"It's a miserable house," groaned she; "you, so lowliest and quiet, and Sae moving about like a white snail, never saying any thing only when she's spoke to. I can't bear up under it much longer, myself. She's always been a self-willed, obstinate girl, and kept me in hot water when she was a young-one; but I'd put up with the worst trick she ever played on me, to see her happy once more. She used to be full of her pranks. Good gracious! how her eyes do look at ye — just like a sleep-walker's!"

"Sometimes I am afraid she'll kill herself," said Mr. Carter, in a low voice.

"She's got too good principle for that, brother."

"I'd tell you what I've been thinkin' of, — moving back to where we came from, in the spring."

"What on 'arth would you do for a livin' when we get back? We're settled here now, and making a little somethin' with prospects

of more when people get thicker. It'll take every cent we've got to carry us back, and then what will we do?"

"I don't know, — and I don't know as I care. I've nothin' to work for, 'les Susan is going to live, and there's only one chance of savin' her, — and that is, gettin' her mind off her troubles by gettin' her to stir round, and shakin' her up a little."

"Wall, I suppose I'll have to do as you say. I've followed you round the world pretty faithful so far, Enos Carter. I've brought up your girl for you, — done by her as I would by one of my own, if I'd ever accepted my offers, and had children, — and now I'm willin' to do till the last."

"You've been a good sister, Debby, no one denies that;" and he sighed wearily.

"I suppose she's off in the woods, now, wanderin' about like a wild creature. She'll get lost some of these days, or carried off by bears. The neighbors have been telling me it's no strange thing to meet a bear in redoubts. They'll be around after acorns, since the feast. When the pigs spoiled so last night, I was certain it was — bless me! who's that stopping at the gate? It's 'Siah White, as sare as my name is Deborah Carter! Well still! if he hasn't tracked us clear here. He's after Sam, I'll bet a basket of chips!"

"I'm right glad to see somebody from the old place," and Mr. Carter went to the door to greet and welcome him.

"How do ye all do?" asked Josiah, shaking hands with both, and looking both surprised and pleased.

"What brought you to this part of the world?" asked his host; taking his valise and overcoat.

"I thought I'd come and see how you was all getting along, — there warn't much to do to home just now. Harvest's over and wheat threshed and corn cut. They had two or three huskin' bees before I left. But, somehow, I couldn't help feeling lonesome to all of 'em; so I just made up my mind to start."

"How did you find us?"

"Wall, by beginnin' along. I did have some trouble about it; but I stuck to the track, and here I am! Glad to see you lookin' so well, Miss Debby. How's Susan?" — as if he had just thought of her.

"She's poorly, very poorly, 'Siah. Her troubles weigh on her," answered Debby; while Mr. Carter sighed.

Enos wanted to inquire what those troubles was, but he could not say a word more, just at the present time. His eyes were wandering out of the door, expectantly.

"We were just talking, Enos and me, about takin' her back — we thought the chance was a dicker good — to live her up."

"Maybe she'll come up her mind to go back with me," — and the girl started awkwardly, raising his hands.

"I wish to goodness she would," said Debby, "but she won't."

"Is that her?"

Josiah stood mutely, surprised and shocked at the change in her

appearance. Pale and thin as a phantom, she glided in from the woods. She was beautiful still, but her beauty was of an unearthly character, which filled her lover with awe as well as adoration.

A slight flush mantled her lily cheeks when she saw the newcomer. It was called there by the remembrance of the part he had once played by the pond on that wintry night. Every thing in her mind was tinted by the medium of her love for Harry Garkner. She gave poor 'Siah her hand, but without the shadow of a smile, asking after his health without any interest in his reply. Prospects were dark for the youth, if he came there hoping to win that broken-hearted girl for a bride.

"It won't do you one speck of good to ask her," Debby assured him, as they stood alone together by the wood-pile, after supper.

"What's come over her?" asked Josiah. "Is she love-sick yet for that young landowner? He gave her the mitten, didn't he?"

"Didn't you know he married her?"

"Married, no! thunder and blazes! what did he leave her for then?"

Debby sat down on a soft stick of the wood-pile, and told him the story of the marriage, and all the subsequent events.

"So she really believes he's dead?" asked her listener, when she had finished.

Of course, — what else is there to think? they left him dead in the wilderness, where, if he'd a come to, he'd a starved. If he'd been alive, nothing on 'arth would have kept him from getting word to his wife, before this time."

"I've reason to think he's still in the land of the living."

"What reason, 'Siah White, for mercy's sake?"

"I'd tell her, if I warnt' afraid the news would be too sudden. I've got a letter here the Widow Sturgiss gave me to give her, — she made me promise certain sure to give it to her if I could find her."

"Do you know what's in it?"

"No. I don't read other folks' letters. However, it's my belief it came from Mr. Garkner to the widow, Mr. Susan. He didn't know she'd left the place, you see. And, to let the cat out of the bag, I just came all the way here to bring that letter. I wish as if I'd had a hand in injuring them as hadn't hurt her, and I wanted to make amends. I thought so much of Susan, I couldn't bear to think she was miserable, and I thought lucky the letter had good news for her, — so I told the widow I'd try and find her, and deliver it with my own hands into hers."

"Lia 'Siah, I didn't know you could be so good-natured. 'Sposin', now you've given up all idea of Susan, you and me hitch horses. I ain't so rery much older than you, — I can take good care of you in health and sickness, — and it's a pity you should come such a long a journey for nothing."

She laid her hand on his arm, and smiled bewitchingly.

"No you don't, old girl," he replied, "I can do better. To tell the full truth, me and Kitty Giles are going to be married 'fore

Christmas. She's the next prettiest girl to Susan in the place. We like each other like buckwheat-cakes and butter. But I couldn't first rest easy in my mind, till I'd done what I could for Susan. But I'll tell you who I guess you could get if you was on the ground to pop the question in time. Kitty's mother died since you came away, and when Kitty marries, old Giles will have to have somebody to help him carry on the tavern. You'd suit each other first rate."

"I shouldn't wonder if we would," answered Debby, reflectively. This prospect, vague as it was, seemed to soothe the wound caused by her recent rejection; her spirits rose to unconstrained gaiety.

"Let's go in and break the news of the letter gently, for she's weak and nervous," she said; "maybe we'll all go back together."

Susan was sitting by the kitchen window, her eyes fixed upon the last lingering crimson of sunset.

"Sarah's brought you a present, — guess what it is?" began Debby.

"I am sure I can not guess. I do not need any thing," she replied, bravely. "You'd better keep it yourself, Aunt."

"If you know what it was, you wouldn't say so," said Josiah.

"I presume it's very nice," — in a wary, spiritless way.

"It'd better be very much," said Josiah, "there's only ten cents postage on it."

She looked quickly up, and saw something in the faces before her which made the blood rush to her face.

"A letter for me? who sent it?"

"Oh! it came from a woman, — in course it ain't a love-letter," said the youth warily, alarmed by the intensity of her look.

"Who would be writing to me," and she looked dull again. "Is it from one of the girls — from Kitty Giles?"

"Now, Susan," broke in Debby, "if you'll behave yourself, and not get in need of the doctor, I'll tell you it's from the Willow Spinster. Maybe there's news in it."

"Give it to me!" cried Susan, rising to her feet, quivering from head to foot, her face like a white star, bright and pale.

"Now don't be foolish, Sue," laughed Josiah, passing the letter in her hand which he had come so far to bring.

"Sure to be it's a man's writing, — maybe you know it."

When she saw the signature, she tried to tear the letter open, but her hand began to swim — the room was dark, the familiar faces faded from her, and she fell to the floor in a swoon.

"That was just what I was afraid of," said Debby, running for the empty bottle, while Josiah made a fan of his hat.

"Here I am better now. Raise me up. Aunt Debby — oh, Aunt Debby, light a candle, won't you quick?"

"Well, I'm married," said the spinster, laughing, as she blew hard upon the candle she held grasped in the tongs, to light the candle with, twice before it lighted.

"I hope not," answered Josiah. "All signs fail in a dry time I may have the pleasure of callin' you mother, yet."

"Pshaw, 'Siah! here, Susan, open your letter."

Shading her face from observation, the girl tore open the missive and read:

MY DARLING, MY OWN SWEET WIFE: — I am safe, I am well almost. If I were quite well, I should fly to you, instead of sending you this. I can not leave my room just yet — perhaps I shall be able to before long. But every day is an age, — and I think it best for you to come to me. I was waylaid, taken by surprise, seized, carried off insensible, and thrown away for dead, in this wretched spot, twenty miles from you. How strange you must think it. What an anguish you must have endured — greater even than mine — for you have all the misery of suspense, while I know that you are probably safe at home. I can not write you all the particulars now, of my illness and recovery; I am too weak, yet. I can tell you all when you fly to me, which you will certainly find some means of doing. Can't you hire Gies to bring you in his buggy? — I will pay him well. Take the Penury road, drive along eighteen miles to Jackson's cross-road, strike into the little south road there, continue on two miles — it is only a kind of bridle path, — you may have to walk. You will come to a house with a well-sweep in front of it — the only one anywhere near. Ask there for me. And now, farewell, my dearest, my wife, and I you fly to my arms. We will overcome all these difficulties some time. My patience has been sorely tired. This will be mailed at the Cross-Roads, and reach you in two days; perhaps in two more you will be here. My own, my sweet wife, farewell. HARRY GARNER.

April 20th.

She looked at the envelope again. It had been sent on to Washington and returned, there being money in it for Susan's use. In those days of slow coaches and no railroads, it took time for a letter to travel from Michigan to Washington, and back again. Mrs. Sturgis had only received it about a month before Josiah left with it; he had been talking with her about Susan and the Garters, and regretting the scandalous way in which the community had treated young Garner, when she had told him of Susan's marriage and her home, of the bridegroom's strange non-appearance, and of the letter she now had.

Moved by remorse, and by a generous impulse now to him, 'Siah had rehearsed his character by this attempt to find the one to whom it belonged. For a few moments a dazzling, blinding, bewitching joy dazed Susan's senses; then, doubt and suspense again asserted their sway. Why had he not made his appearance in all these long months since the letter was written? Maybe he had grown worse again — had died alone, wondering why she did not answer

his appeal and fly to him. Oh, cruel blunder of the soulless devil! as if they had not trouble enough, without this, to fill the cup.

"We must get ready, father," she said, "to-morrow — to-night, to go back, and find this place he has directed us to. If he is real, we will know it then — this suspense will be over."

"Let's all pack up and go back," said Delany, her then-las on Giles' tavern.

"Wait, wait; time enough in the morning, girl," said Mr. Carter. "I'll be for the best, Susan, and try to pack up strong enough to bear the journey."

"And now, father," said Susan with a faint smile, placing her hand in his, "whether Harry and I ever meet again on this earth, or not, I forgive you for all you ever did to us in the past, and thank you for bringing me this letter."

"Kitty and me are going to get married," blathered the youth. "She still loves me, and wants you to come to the wedding."

"I shall be glad to see you and Kitty married," replied Susan. "She is both good and pretty, and a nice housekeeper. Once, I would not have given you credit for being worthy of her; but I have changed my mind;" and she smiled so beautifully, that Sam liked to "have gone off the handle," as he expressed it to Kitty afterwards.

Mr. Carter thought it best not to start until he had gone over to the little settlement, and found some one who wanted to take the tavern off his hands, and pay him what the furniture and good-will were worth. He found a man ready to close a bargain; for tavern-keeping is a favorite business with a certain class of men, who are always shifting from one community to another, and who like to take life easy.

"We shall return in less time than we came, with this fine animal to draw us," said Mr. Carter, upon the morning of the second day, as he cracked his whip, and the little old creaky wagon rolled on once more, loaded with the family, and such small stock of goods as was endeared to them in their old life. Josiah rode beside them looking very well contented with himself and the world.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NIGHT OF ADVENTURES.

The journey was nearly accomplished. One day more as good speed as they had been making would bring the party of travelers into their own neighborhood. It was a fine, bright autumn evening, and they concluded it would be more comfortable to camp out, as

they had done several times before, than to attempt to find one of the dirty little inns farther on.

Stopping by a tiny brook which ran sparkling across the road, and under the shelter of a great oak tree, part of whose young leaves carpeted the turf below, they tied the horses loosely, so that they might crop the grass, and proceeded to make themselves as comfortable as circumstances would allow. Josiah brought dry sticks and pieces of half-burned wood, and soon kindled a cheerful fire, over which the old tin coffee-pot was placed, giving forth a delicious odor to the hungry three, whose appetites were sharpened by a long day's ride.

We say the hungry three, for, although there was a fourth one, Susan never knew whether she was hungry or not. Her whole being was so absorbed in the one great mingling of hope and fear, that she simply *endured* the present. While the supper was being prepared, she went down by the trickling water, and sat by the bank, dropping leaves into it, and watching them as they drifted and eddied away. To-night she felt uneasy. A sense of danger depressed her, she hardly knew why. The day before, they had been passed on the way, by three or four men on horseback, the usual mode of travelling in those days, who looked back after them with staring glances. She had discovered, to her alarm, that two of these persons were Bill Ellis and Jim Cross, so much disguised that neither her father nor Debby suspected who they were. She had not heard of Bill Ellis' escape from the authorities, but presumed he must have aided him in getting out of the not very secure prison.

Since this unexpected appearance she had felt tremulous and frightened, almost expecting a band of highwaymen to spring out of every forest and thicket which they passed. She remembered the ugly expression, and his threat of vengeance against herself, of Bill Ellis, when he was dragged away from the Black Bear.

Now as she sat there, dropping the leaves and seeing them whirled away, a shadow seemed to fall upon her. She looked around. Only the brightest and most cheery of pictures met her gaze. Her father watering the horses, Aunt Debby's tall figure between her and the leaping, dancing fire, which lighted up the road to a long distance, Josiah broiling slices of ham on the sharp end of a stick — a little back, the dark forest — and before her the murmuring rivulet, croaking in some places, with the light of the leaping flames. Across the stream there was quite a little bank, where the earth had slipped off, and the wood grew down close to it, only parted by the narrow road. Not seeing any visible cause of uneasiness, it grew upon her fancy that there was a panther lurking in the branches of the trees, which overhung the brook, that his fiery eyes were directed toward her with expectation, and that suddenly he would spring upon her, and she would be lost. She thought of her father's loaded rifle lying in the wagon, ready at a touch, and of the pocket-pistol which she carried — but she could not rise to flee from the impending danger — she was weighed upon and paralyzed by fear.

"Come, Susan," called Josiah, "I've toasted this slice expressly for you. You never seen a nicer bit of pig-meat. It's time for you to quit sentimentalizing, and take to eating;" and he turned round toward the brook, with the ham on his impromptu wooden fork. Susan was not there.

"Susan! Susan! Where's the girl gone to?" called Mr. Carter. At that instant they were answered by a piercing shriek from the opposite wood, which made each one turn, with a pale face, and stare at the other.

"It's Indians," shuddered Debby.

"It's a panther," said Josiah; "hear the bushes rustle."

"Father! help!"

Mr. Carter seized his rifle, sprang into the brook, and ran a short distance, until he could climb the bank, up which he rushed and had barely got a firm footing, before he was knocked back into the water, rifle and all.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed a voice above him, which he recalled as that of Bill Ellis, "try it again, old fellow. It's bad work, betraying the league to the officers. I guess your pretty daughter will never try it again. We're going to have our revenge now!"

Carter struggled to his feet, and again dashed forward with his useless weapon, followed by Josiah, leaving Debby screaming and alone. This time he was not repulsed, the speaker bounding into the woods, flinging back a sarabande hurrah.

They heard no more cries from Susan, whose mouth was stuffed with a handkerchief, as she was hurried along by three men into the pathless depths of the woods. In the forest it was dark — too dark for the pursuers to make any progress; the twilight of the road was here black night.

"It is useless to go on in this manner," said Josiah, as he stumbled and fell for the third time. "They not only know the way, but they have lanterns. They are not so afraid of our overtaking them but what they have lighted 'em. I must get torches."

"Get 'em, if you will," cried the father, in agony, "but I can not stop. Be spry, Josiah."

Josiah had obtained part of the fuel for his fire from a dead and fallen pine-tree, from which he had amused himself breaking some knots, before he undertook the culinary task of broiling the ham. He now rushed back for these, lighting them at the fire, where the coffee smoked unregarded.

"O'Siah! O'Siah White! don't leave me here all alone!" screamed Debby, as he prepared to start with the blazing torches.

"Let go my coat-tail!" cried the young man, sternly. "Nobody's going to hurt you. Just keep up the fire, and hold the carmin'-ant in yer hand, and stay till we come back;" and wrenching his garments from her grasp, he bounded off.

"Every second is an age," gasped Mr. Carter, as Josiah overtook him, seizing one of the torches; "O'Siah! they are out of sight and hearing."

The way was difficult in the extreme, thick growth of underbrush impeding their steps; and, as the party pursued their flight through the forest, having every advantage of knowing their own destination, and the best paths by which to reach it, their pursuers were small in heel. As time passed, and they grew weary and anxious, weariness on in doubt and despair, the frantic father continued in his agony.

"I brought it all on her. I wouldn't let her have the best and best of men, who loved her to distraction. I took her on among desperadoes and ignoramuses — and now, I'm getting myself killed! — forgive me, and have mercy on a father's anguish!"

At times he stopped, straining his ears to listen for the slightest sound of underbrush, or for some cry which might direct him forward — and when no token came, going on again with set teeth and eyes which glared like a hunted tiger's.

All the courage there was in Josiah's rough nature was evoked by the emergency. Could he have encountered a dozen armed men, and by rushing among them, have sought for Susan's slayers, he would not have hesitated. But alas! there was no opportunity for testing the "fight" which was in him. They wandered on and on around, not knowing but that every step took them from assistance toward the hopeless, and they would have felt so soon.

The flickering light of the pine-knots burned out, leaving them lost in the depths of the forest. Mr. Carter, giving up all hope, flung himself upon the ground and groaned aloud; Josiah sat and silent, remained beside him.

"Don't, don't take on so," he pleaded, at last. "We must do something — either go forward, or try and find our way back to poor Debby."

Again they wandered on in the darkness.

"I see a light," cried Josiah, presently. "We're coming out on the road — and this is a farm-house — I remember passing it, on my way out to your house. They ain't gone to bed yet — let's get there and try and git help."

"It'll be of no use, Josiah. Them villains have means of their own, where they're as safe from pursuit as a snail in his shell."

"You ain't a goin' to give up so? Where there's life there's hope. Come, come, rouse yourself, friend Carter."

He had almost to drag his companion across the road, and up to the door, where he knocked loudly, and was quickly answered by a neat-looking young girl. The opening of the door revealed a cheerful scene: the sitting-room of a comfortable house, where the family were assembled at their evening meal. A large fire burned on the floor, and the fire in the large fireplace flared over the tall corner-clock, the high best bed, the old lady in the wicker chair, knitting stockings, two or three happy girls, a tired-looking father and son, and a contented-looking mother.

There was another entrance, where Susan did not at first perceive it.

— a young man lounging on the settle, looking like a convalescent just brightening up after a long illness.

"We went home," spoke Josiah. "We're peaceable travelers and enjoying our journey on the road, some rascals pounced on us, and carried off a young girl."

At the first sound of his voice, the invalid on the settle had sprung up, and was staring at him. Mr. Carter saw who he was, and pushed him into the room.

"Those devils have got my girl!" he said, in a choked voice.

"Who? when? where have they gone? Answer instantly, and to the point, Mr. Carter. All depends on speed."

"It's Bill Hoo, and others of the same gang as kidnapped you, Mr. Carter. They're a spite against Susan for betrayin' 'em, and they've come to be revenged. It seems they tracked us just as we were about to start for the night, and Susan a little way off from us, by the creek, they pounced out of the woods and carried her off. It's been a two hours' ride."

"We crossed 'em," cried Josiah, "but they got clear out of sight and sound — we've no idea which way to take, and our lights went out, and —"

"Now, get your rifles! Have courage, Mr. Carter. I know where they have taken your child, and if we can reach them in time we shall save her. I know a shorter route than the one they will be obliged to take. Come!"

Harry's face was white and his tone stern. The father's anguish could not exceed that of the young husband. The father and son took down their rifles, the women running to bring them ammunition, in case they should engage in a regular battle. There was no time lost in wonder, curiosity, or explanation.

They were then, well armed, started forth, Harry leading the way. Following the trail for three miles or more, they reached at last a narrow, irregular lumber by-road, which straggled off along the back of a hill. The stars shone brightly, so that they had no difficulty in making their way without the use of lanterns. For two or three miles more they hurried on at as fast a rate as they could maintain.

"Halt!" whispered Harry, as they came within sight of a distant fire, and a cluster of the little square windows of a log-house, a little back from the road. "All now depends upon silence. The cabin is surrounded by the pine, fir, and, I repeat, by so many, as I told you. We must surround the place without being detected, if we are to have a chance. They are always ready for a surprise — these rascals — and the first shot will start them. We will stand in the woods here, and approach the house from behind."

With the utmost caution they made their way into the rear, their rifles ready for instant action. The rest of the party remaining crouched behind trees, Harry stole up to the window and looked in. A single observer had been posted over the sash, to keep out of servation, should any one in that wild district ever seek to make any; but

a corner of it was torn away, so that it afforded a friendly shelter to Harry, while it enabled him to reconnoiter the inside.

His blood boiled with indignation, as he surveyed the scene, and yet a feeling of relief came over him which was like a respite from death. An old woman was busy cooking supper over the fire, and four men were talking, laughing, singing, and drinking, and making themselves hurrying the preparations for the repast. Near the fire which shone full in her face, sat Susan, her hands and feet on, but her dress somewhat torn and discolored from the mud in which she had been hurried along. Her hands were trembling. Her face was pale and fixed, except that her mute, beseeching eyes followed the old woman, as if from her she might imagine that pity she did not expect from her captors. While Harry gazed, the supper was set up, and the four men drew benches to the table, and seated themselves.

"Push the young lady nearer to us, where we can have the pleasure of feeling her," said Bud Ellis, with a laugh.

"Come, now, fellows, you behave yourselves," growled Jim Cross, angrily. "I only asked you to help me get hold of her. She's mine, and if any of the rest of you lay a hand on her, I'll shoot you."

"Oh will you, now?" said Ellis; "but perhaps I shouldn't give her up so easily. Our rule has been, a fair division of the spoils."

Harry crept back to his company.

"There are four of them, and five of us," he said. "Boys, are you sure your guns are all right?"

Mr. Carter had left his wetted rifle at the farm house, and taken another.

"They're all right," he answered for the party.

"The whole four are just now seated at the supper-table, unsuspecting of any one in their vicinity. Their weapons stand in a corner of the room. My plan is for us to shoot every black-hearted rascal of them, before he has time to seize his gun and make fight."

The farmer and his son demurred to this.

"Then all I've got to say," answered Harry, "is, that you do not know what day your own children may fall into their hands. They're the scourge of the State — have been guilty of almost every crime, and have forfeited their lives to the law long ago. It would be wrong in us to spare them. What? Shall I challenge a coward like one of you, by pitting it in an equal fight against these criminals? I say, no! My plan is to shoot them down dead. There are two doors to the cabin — one in front, just opposite this. Let us divide our force, and open each door at the same instant, and fire upon them before they can spring. Only, don't shoot the girl!"

"No danger of any of us making that mistake," replied the

farmer. "We're old hunters, me and my boy, and we know game when we see it."

Carter, Josiah, and the farmer's son went round to the front, Harry and the old farmer crept up to the rear.

During the moment of waiting and silence which ensued, they heard rude laughter from the quartette of revolvers, who were enjoying their supper, unconscious of the danger which lingered so terribly near. Suddenly, both doors were burst open, and a bullet went straight through the hearts of two of the men, before they could rise from their chairs. Jim Cross was bending over toward Susan in such a position that the men were afraid to shoot; with one bound he sprang to the door, where a hand-to-hand scuffle ensued between him and the two persons stationed there, from whom he managed to escape, and bounded into the shadow of the woods, minus his weapons.

The other of the four desperadoes was but slightly wounded; and as he cried "quarter" most pitifully, the rescuers thought best to take him in charge, and hand him over to the proper authorities. The old woman was also arrested and bound as an accomplice.

In the mean time, where was Susan? As, once upon a time, she had cut the thongs which bound him, so now Harry liberated those slender wrists, and when the others had time to look and think, they found the young couple oblivious of all the world save each other.

If ever a young woman was justifiable in having the hysterics, it was the long-lost wife upon this occasion — and that she laughed and cried in a most uncontrollable way, was forgiven her by all the witnesses. As soon as the two came to their senses, so as to recognize the claims of others, Mr. Carter advanced and held out his hand to Harry.

"You have found her," he said; "and never shall you be parted by word or deed of mine. I ask your pardon for the past; and if my good-will and blessing are worth any thing to you, you have 'em, and welcome!"

Sadie looked up into her father's face, clasping her husband's hand, with a look of peace and happiness which blotted out many weary days and many wicked deeds.

"And here's Josiah," continued Mr. Carter; "if you knew the errand that brought him out after us, you'd bury the hatchet between you, and shake hands on the spot."

"Yes, Harry," said Susan, "he came a tiresome ten days' journey to bring me that long-lost letter of yours, which you sent to me last spring. Forgive all things, and let us all be friends."

"I'm goin' to marry Kitty Giles, so I'm remarried now, you know," remarked Josiah; "but I couldn't have no peace of mind to get married and be enjoyin' myself, till I'd undone as much of the mischief 'twixt you two as I could, so 'n' I'd such a hand in separatin' you. The widow Stargis was a frettin' awful about that letter, so I just told Kitty she'd got to wait, for I was goin' to find Susan Carter if she was to be found this side the Rocky Mountains. We was on our way back when we got into this all-fired scrape — which

has jist turned out to be a lucky thing, seein' it's not only ruz you out of your hole, but has rid the country of them dreadful rascals."

"Let's get the child away from these sickening sights," said Mr. Carter, shuddering at the two dead men, whose retribution had overtaken them so suddenly and awfully.

"Yes, let us go," whispered Susan.

That night at the farm-house was one long remembered by its inmates. The man and woman under arrest were tightly bound and confined in an out-house during the night. It was not until the party were gathered once more around the cheerful fire that any thought of poor Debby, so exciting had been their adventure and its results. Susan was the first who mentioned her.

"La! poor soul, she'll be scart nigh to death," said Josiah. "Jest the rest of you stay here, and make yourselves comfortable, while I go back and get her. I'll bring the whole kit along, and we'll jist make a night of it at your house, farmer, if you say so."

"Of course I say so. My gals will have supper ready for the hull lot aginst you get back. It's only a matter of two miles from here to the creek, by the road."

"I'd better go along, in case of another ambush," said Harry, and the two went back along the road for the deserted sister.

They found her curled up as far back in the covered wagon as she could get, the carving-knife held in front of her, and so blinded by terror that she refused to recognize them, after they had made themselves known.

"Go home!" she cried; "ain't it enough you've seized and carried off Susan, without comin' back for me?"

"No, it ain't enough at all. We want you," laughed Josiah, supposing she would see who it was.

"You shan't have me! never! never! go 'long!"

She flourished the big knife furiously.

"Come, now, Debby, we've found Susan, and supper is waiting," said Harry.

"Don't try to coax me. S'pose I'm gain' to be coaxed off to be murdered in cold blood. Go 'long, I say."

"Why, Debby, don't you know me? you don't think your own brother, Harry Gardner, would kidnap you, do you?"

"Is that you, Harry?" she asked, doubtfully — and then, as the scales of fright fell from her eyes and ears, and she saw and heard correctly, the threatening knife dropped in her lap, and she just sat, still and looked at them in mute astonishment. They lifted the horse to the wagon, Josiah mounted his stool, and Harry had actually lifted Aunt Debby out, and placed her in the midst of the circle around the farm-house fire, before she came to herself enough to ask questions.

The best that could be got up on short notice was placed on the hospitable board, and exciting talk and explanations kept the whole party sleepless until the morning broke.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DOUBLE WEDDING.

It was the evening of Kitty Giles' marriage. Now indeed the old tavern glowed with a brilliancy which far outshone even the splendor of the leaving ball the previous year. In every fireplace the hickory logs glowed and flashed; garlands hung from the dining-room, the sitting-room, the kitchen, and the ball room. Even in one year the settlement had advanced in the luxuries of civilization; real sperm candles glimmered in every available nook; and the mince-pies were not made from dried apples.

The wedding was going to be a very public affair. Kitty had wished to be married quietly, since her mother had been dead but half a year; but her father would not hear to his only daughter's going away from home in any such style. It was the fashion of the times. A wedding without a wedding feast, with wine, and dancing, and rejoicing, was a mean and ill-omened wedding. There must be the festivities at home; and the second evening, either the bride or some intimate friend gave the "in-fairs" — on this occasion it was to be at the house of the bridegroom's father. Jerusha White was to be bride-maid, and Jonathan Giles, Kitty's brother, was to be green-man.

The neighbors had all taken hold and helped Kitty in her preparations. "Miss" Peters had made the pies — pumpkin, cranberry, and mince; Jerusha, Kitty, and half-a-dozen other girls had made the "capers" of cake. Mr. Giles had sent to Pontiac for raisins and citron, currants and spices, and a box of wine. Everybody was invited, and everybody was excited at the fabulous tales which went abroad, of the astonishing profusion of fruit-cake, and almonds, and asparagus there was to be; mothers kept their children in unwonted subservience by the promise of these dainties "after the wedding," if they "were good." Far enough must be provided not only for the company to feast upon, but for each guest to carry away a handful of for pocketful. Every youth and maiden must have a piece of the wedding-cake to put under their pillows and dream upon three nights "hand-reading," that they might find out who they were going to marry. And it would be almost a disgrace to the bride, if she did not have some of the veritable bride-cake on hand, every time a friend dropped in, for a year after the event.

Kitty shed a good many tears to think her dear mother had no visible part in all this rejoicing. Yet she firmly believed she rejoiced with her in spirit; but she could not help being happy and

excited — the pretty central light, around which all this brilliancy revolved.

Debby Carter, kind, unselfish, motherly body that she was, ('') just come over and staid the last week, taking the charge of the place generally. Mr. Giles had not decided what to do after Kitty left. He had some thoughts of renting the tavern-stand, and returning to private life. He had secured a tolerably good "help" to do the rough work, but things did not go on so smoothly as they had under Mrs. Giles' notable administration.

But, to come back to the all-important evening. The gayest illumination that sperm could give, lit up the house from cellar to garret. Young people, afar off, just putting on the list of their finery, heard the premonitory squeaks of fiddles, which were drawn forth in the bar-room by the arriving musicians, and the tantalizing sounds caused their fingers to tremble in tying their cravats and sashes. At seven o'clock, everybody invited was gathered in the long sitting-room, the hall, the bed-room adjoining, and even crowded into the bar-room for the time being. Not one half of them could hope to see the bride and bridegroom at the moment of the ceremony. All were so eager to do this, that the father finally yielded to the suggestion of the young folks, to have the ceremony take place in the ball-room, where all would have a tolerable chance. So, to the ball-room the guests went. At ten minutes past seven, the minister, Mr. and Mrs. White, and Mr. Giles, entered, and took seats at the top of the room. A buzz and stir greeted their appearance, which heralded the approach of the still more important personages.

At fifteen minutes past seven, in walked Jeremiah White upon the arm of Jonathan Giles, followed by Josiah and Kitty, amidst the breathless hush of the assembly, proceeding to the top of the apartment, where the bride-maid and groom-man paraded, and the couple to be married took their places between them, facing the good old minister, who rose and advanced to them.

How bashful and yet blessed was the countenance of the groom. And how Kitty *did* change color — pale and red, pale and red, and yet, looking her prettiest all the time! Before the minister began the ceremony, there was a moment improved by the female guests in scrutiny of the bride's dress. It was admirably white silk, — Kitty had sent her measure away to Peter's and had it bought and made up there. Around her trim little figure floated a soft veil of tulle soon here, which fell from a wreath of white lilies crowning her black hair. Her slippers were of white satin, and both she and Jeremiah wore white kid gloves, which came halfway up between the wrist and elbow, and were trimmed with thread lace. Jeremiah's dress was made from the best piece of black-moelin in Peter's store, and had pink ribbon run in the ticks. Both the bridegroom and his aid wore white silk gloves, and had white silk handkerchiefs hanging out of their coat-tail pockets.

But the minister commenced speaking, and all eyes turned to the

two crimson faces. Kitty's black eyes were veiled by their long lashes, but Josiah looked the parson manfully in the eye, and responded, "I will," in a loud, strange voice, which the girl by his side would not have recognized at any other time, and in direct contrast to her faintly whispered token of assent.

"I am married to you man and wife," concluded the minister; and immediately claimed the privilege of being the first to kiss the bride.

"Oh, my! how I feel," whispered Debby, clinging to the father's arm; "just as much agitated as if it were a denigrator of my own. I've always taken an uncommon interest in Kitty."

"There ain't no my girl's here a-pud," responded the proud parent.

"I don't know how I'll get along, now that she's going away."

"She's waitin' for me to shake hands with her," said Mr. Giles, wiping his eyes, and, grasping his daughter's hand, he kissed her heartily, while she sobbed and cried.

"Don't cry, now, Kitty; there's lots of kissing to be done," said Josiah. So everybody in the room kissed the newly-married pair.

While this part of the proceedings was taking place, Debby regained her place by the widower's side.

"'Twill be hard for you," she murmured, in a subdued and sympathizing tone; "I've thought of you so often this past week. I see lots and lots of things going wrong. That help of yours don't take no interest, Mr. Giles. The bottom's burned out of the brass preserving-kettle Mrs. Giles was so careful of, and there was a pitcher broken, and thrown out behind the wood-pile yesterday."

"I don't see what I'm to do."

"Every thing's going to wrack and ruin as fast as it can. I no doubt the tables — some of 'em wanted darning; and that cellar, you ought to see the state it's in."

"I've been thinkin' I'd have to sell out, or rent."

"It would be a great pity for you to do that Mr. Giles, when you've got such a splendid run of custom, and every thin' flourishin', making money hand over hand. Why don't you get some good, industrious woman, to take charge of the house for you?"

"How could I get one, Miss Carter? Who could I get?"

"Why, marry somebody, of course. It needs a wife to take an interest. There won't nobody else, you may depend."

Mr. Giles scratched his head, and looked slywise at the suggestive epistemon. She was famous for her cooking, Debby was, and she had made herself extremely useful the past week. No doubt she was just the person. He took a second glance. Debby was looking tolerably well; she had had a dove-colored Tippet-cloth made out of muslin, and a black-lace head-dress which she wore, concealed the coarseness of her black hair, while the ringlets in front were as glossy as goose-oil could make them.

"It's rather soon for me to be takin' another wife, Miss Carter."

"Everybody knows how bad you need one, with Kitty leaving you with this great tavern on your hands. Besides," she whispered "it

don't cost any more to have two wellings at the same time, than it does one."

"That's a fact. You're a sensible woman, Miss Debby. If you're a mind, just say so, and we'll stand right up."

"Oh, dear me! I was not a thinking of myself—I—I—"

"Say yes or no, Debby."

"Well—yes, then, if you will hurry me so, but I never thought—"

No matter. Here, I urson, here's another couple requires your services"

The company, which was beginning to scatter, paused, close and curious. Debby blushed a little, but here their surprise had a heroine, as the widower took her hand, and the minister accomplished the object of her life, by making her a wife.

"I feel relieved, father,—you will not be so lonely," said the younger bride, as she kissed him after the ceremony.

"Good for you, mother Debby,—I know you'd bring it about," whispered Josiah, as he squeezed her hand.

"Go along," said the mother-in-law, stopping his check.

"My friends," spoke up the pastor, just after this little episode, "before the old folks go down stairs, leaving the younger ones to dance, there's a person wishes to make a little speech to you."

Another surprise? once more the company was all curiosity. The same door which had given entrance to the bridal party now opened, and a young couple, not recently seen in their midst, entered,—**Susan and Harry.**

"Mr. and Mrs. Garliner,"—announced the pastor.

It was the first time any public announcement of their marriage had taken place; there was a manner and stare of surprise. There was danger that the interest legitimately belonging to the bride and groom, would be usurped by so many, all wearing the bridal honors.

Susan wore the white dress in which she had been married. The roses of love and hope were opening again on her cheeks. Not so bright, not so sparkling, as merry, black-eyed Kitty White, she possessed an ethereal beauty which was all her own. She stood by Harry's side, her soul in her eyes, watching him while he spoke. His countenance bore traces of recent illness; but his proud, athletic form showed an innate strength, capable of resisting the ravages of more than one such sickness.

"Having been asked by our friends to be present on this happy occasion," he began, "we wished to accept the invitation, showing that we leave the community without any ill feeling toward it. We have been made to suffer, much and bitterly, and without protection. We were obliged to meet by stealth, to marry in secret, and were torn apart, for long months of suspense and suffering, by the same spirit of persecution. These troubles are over. Some of those most active against me, have signified their sense of the injustice they did me, and have asked to be forgiven. Mr. Carter has got

en me his daughter, with the assurance that he is glad she is my wife. Josiah White, the happy bridegroom, once bound to tear me in pieces, is now one of the best of friends.

"What I desire to make known is this: — every farmer who holds any land of mine is welcome to it. I am going to return to the East, and shall make no further claim upon any one. I am well provided for in money, time, expense, and persecution in this fortune, which I leave to my heirs," and he turned to Susan, kissing her hand.

A murmur of applause and delight ran through the assembly. The speech was so handsome, so noble, — and Mr. Gardner had spoken with such spirit, such generosity! The tide had turned.

The fiddles, fiddles, and clarionet began to tune up; and the minister, who had just taken a hasty retreat to the sound, alarmed lest they should not be in time, caught in a hall-room, and perhaps keeping time with the fiddle. The wifower and his bride went with him, and how the wifower was twirling, curd-playing, and a little repressed festivity; while the two brides and their grooms led off the dance, making music in their pulses and thrilling in their hearts.

"It's wonders how every thing has come out to everybody's satisfaction," remarked Dobby to Mrs. Peters, as they sat together on a corner of the settee, in the best room, with their neighbors busy talking and making themselves comfortable.

"Well, yes, it is, rather," said that lady drily.

It was women to see through one another's "arts and wiles," and they don't like to see even a mother succeed, either; and now Mrs. Peters, though a married woman and the mother of seven children, having no personal interest whatever in the matter, was almost vexed at the success of the young lady by the cunning step-mother, with whom she had been engaged for the last week in performing the awful duty of making the pie and cake for the next occasion.

"Don't you believe the tailors are ready to come up?" she asked.

"No, yes. I left Mary washing the potatoes half an hour ago. But I'm so contented to-night, I forgot every thing. You see I didn't expect to be married for a month yet."

"Oh, didn't you? You must be rather frustrated. Come, then; Miss Brown, and Miss Sturgis, and Miss White are going to help us **draw up the things.**"

Shortly after, the welcome summons to supper was obeyed by the guests. Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs sat at the head, Susan and Harry to the right, Katy and Josiah to the left, the minister next on the left, Mr. Carter next on the right, and the other guests in a long row down the extensive dining-room. There were also two side tables, equally well laid, — and when we report that not only did the company sit down to every course of the excellent, from the roast turkey to the stashed apples, but that each one left the table with a paper or a handkerchief well stuffed with the choicest bits, it will

be seen that to supply the guests for such a wedding was no small undertaking.

That hour at the head of a brilliantly-lighted table was the most triumphant of Debby's life. She was a married woman, and she was the landlady of Giles' tavern. Nothing more was wanting to her heart or to her ambition, and she could afford to smile benignly upon the young couple at her right.

After supper, the sedater of the guests withdrew. There were still a few couples of young people keeping up the dance, but for the purpose of waiting till the bridal parties had retired, and then paying them the accustomed visit. But Kitty was a spirited lassie, and she proposed to weary them out.

"Come, Harry," she said, drawing him and Susan into a quiet corner of the deserted front-room, "come, Josiah, let's have a talk. — let's hold a grand Indian pow-wow, all by ourselves. Josiah has not told me one word about your adventures yet." Susan took her hand into Harry's, and he began his narrative —

I was driving cautiously along the road beyond the willow Swamp, looking through the twilight for the glimmer of Susan's house, and out of my buggy, and led my horse, for there were branches hanging low, and logs scattered here and there. Suddenly I was seized and gagged. I thought of my wife, and resisted like a mad dog when her cubs are in danger. I made such good work of it, that even the robbers seized a knot of wood from a neighbouring tree and killed me senseless. What happened after that I do not know, until the morning broke over me, and I aroused myself from a deep slumber, with a sickening weight in my limbs, and a terrible feeling in my head. I looked about me. I was in a forest, but it did not seem to me the same. I hid down again, and remained some time, thinking I should die. But the thought of Susan roused me again, and I kept on, I knew not where, whether deeper into or out of the woods. Coming to a little brook trickling through the mass, I wet my throat and quenched my thirst; gaining courage to stagger on for perhaps an hour, when I came out upon a by-road near a log cabin. I knocked the door, and I knocked; but when a woman came and opened the door, I fell forward insensible, and I was lying for the next two days.

When I did come to my senses, I was so reduced I could hardly walk. It was two weeks before I could wield a pen, and the woman who nursed me, could not write. I found from her that I was twenty miles or more from the settlement. She had a single sheet of paper, and an old pen which had been used by her husband, and she squeezed out the juice from some berries for me to write with. I had just change enough in my pocket to pay the postage on the letter, and a stray bird which had been overlooked by the robbers. I put it in the letter, thinking Susan would need it to get to me. I left out my watch or chain, — my trunk, papers, clothing, and everything I had gone. I told the woman my story, and she was very kind. She took my letter to the little house, at the settlement, where the road

stopped once a week, taking in the few tributes from the scattered inhabitants.

There was something strange about her living all alone in a hut in the woods. She did not seem to lack for provisions though how she got them, I did not know. She told me her husband was off on the horses' back — that he spent his summers so. She had two children, but I did not believe they were her own.

When time sufficient had passed for me to expect Susan, my state of suspense and excitement told terribly on my weakened frame. The woman warned me that I would bring back my fever if I did not control myself. My sense of hearing became preternaturally acute. Night and day I listened, listened for the expected roll of heavy wheels. Through the day I sat in the door by the little dim window, just able to hold myself up, looking, listening, and every hour suffering from such an acute sense of disappointment, that, as the nurse told me, I brought back my fever. For six weeks I never left my bed. Oh, how I longed for some stranger to come along, and knock into that little horse, that I might beg him to write another letter for me. Was Susan sick? was she dead? why did she not come? I asked the woman to go to the cross-roads and get a letter written there for me, — but for some reason she refused. She did not seem to wish to meet her few neighbors, and I remembered that when she went before, she chose the evening for the errand.

I began to regard her as a suspicious character. At last company came to the door, — two men, who came in the evening, and only stayed over night. There were two rooms to the hut, and, as I laid in the smaller one, I could hear them whispering together nearly all night. The men came in and took a look at me, and asked me what was the matter with me, and if I should be able to pay my board if I got well. I answered that I should reward the woman well for her services when I got able to return to my friends, but that I had no money then as I had been robbed. They showed some curiosity upon hearing of the robbery, inquiring the place and time; — just then I saw, by the light of the light in the other room, that one of them was wearing my watch-guard. I knew it in an instant. The chain and seal were too peculiar for me to be mistaken. I asked him where he got the watch, saying it was a curious pattern, and I'd like to buy it if I were rich. He answered that he had bought it from a friend. I did not tell them it was mine, for I was weak, and in their power to do as they pleased. I suspected them, now, to be members of a gang, other members of which had been engaged in kidnapping me. After they returned to the larger room, I heard them stowing away sundry articles in a closet, which they could reach by standing on a bench. Now was the evening. I concluded that the woman was a confederate and receiver of stolen goods.

As I told you before, my hearing was preternaturally acute; and I could distinctly understand portions of the conversation carried on in the lowest whisper, while they supposed me to be sleeping.

"He must be the same," said one.

"Yes," said the other, "Bill Lins told me all about it. They thought they had stopped his chopper effectively. But it seems they didn't. I wonder if he noticed whose chain I had on!"

"He's too used up to notice any thing. I think the old woman better keep a nursing him up. It'll pay. I know all about him. He's rich and liberal; he treated them fellows all right, that served him such a dirty trick. They say he was in love with Carter's girl -- did you ever see her? -- she's dear and pretty."

"No! but her father's a regular old tramp, -- and obstinate as mule. He was one of the conspirators. He's moved away from these parts now."

My heart gave such a great thump as I heard the latter sentence it seemed to me as if they must hear it.

"Where's he gone?"

"Don't know. Moved off, cause he was mad about this young fellow, -- took his girl off, to get rid of him."

"Maybe they'd like us to make an end of him. I know Bill and Jim have got his papers, and are makin' a good thing out of 'em. What do you say, old woman, to givin' him a dose?"

"Wouldn't like to," she grumbled. "The children likes him, and I does myself."

"Oh, well, we won't trouble you. A full blow with this will do the job;" and the villain struck something which he held lightly against the wall.

Despite my long sickness, I was in no mood to resign life; and silently as a shadow I slipped out of bed, put on my slippers, which hung at the foot, and crept out the little square window, through which I could just squeeze my body. It was the first time I had stood on my feet for some days; I was dizzy and weak; but I crawled back into the wood, and wondered I knew not whether.

Determined to have done so, and with the feeble strength which it gave, I ran a great distance, sometimes laughing and sometimes sighing that I was pursued by panthers or moccasins or rattlesnakes.

By daylight I had come out on a strange road in a more civilized part of the country, as I found afterward, for I knew nothing of it then, sinking insensibly to the ground, where I was shortly afterwards picked up by a kind-hearted farmer, taken to his house, and skillfully nursed by his wife and daughters for three or four weeks. If my condition had not been excellent, I never should have returned.

I think, Sam, (with a light laugh), one of the good farmer's daughters was falling in love with me, I was so interesting a patient, -- but I took care to let it be known that I was a married man. From this place I wrote to my lawyer, who then discovered the forgery imposed upon him.

I was just thinking of venturing my strength and leaving the farmhouse, when that strange chance threw Mr. Carter into my vicinity, and made me instrumental in the rescue of my own wife.

"Didn't you reward those kind nurses?" asked Sue. "If it had not been for them, I should never, never have seen you again."

"I have not yet, I declare," cried Harry. "I could think of nothing but my lost wife since she is found. But you shall go to Peter's store to-morrow, and pick out three of the handsomest silk dresses he has, and any other trinkets you think will delight the girls, and I will send the package by the first wagon that passes that way."

"Oh, let me go along?" said Kitty, "I do so love to buy pretty things!"

"When I reached this place," continued Harry, "the widow Sturge's told me of the delay of my letter, and that Josiah had started, only three days before, to find Susan and deliver it to her."

"This is a bad world, isn't it?" sighed Kitty.

"Now, Kitty, you don't think so to-night, do you?" asked 'Siah.

"It's good and it's bad, but mostly good to me now, since I am so happy," said Sue.

"Why yes; it's good and it's bad," remarked Harry. "I thought, a while ago, that it was mostly bad; but since those disinterested farmers took such good care of me, and since Josiah here performed so generous an action, and your father, Sue, has behaved so finely, — and since I find what a sweet, what a priceless treasure a wife is, I certainly believe it is mostly good."

"Say, children," said Aunt Debby, coming into the room, "the company's all gone, and everybody is retired. Don't you think it's time to shut up the house?"

CHAPTER XV

THE SQUATTERS' CANDIDATE

THE affair at Mr. White's the evening after the wedding was a joyous affair, second only in interest and merriment to the wedding itself. Mrs. Deborah Giles was the queen of the occasion. The ancient bride wore her honors with a grace which was all her own. She seated Penelope Barbell, the sole remaining old maid of the neighborhood, looking down upon her out of the heights of her own superior estate, with a pitying dignity.

Among the men of the party, the affair partook something of the nature of a political meeting. The November election of State officers was at hand, and in this particular district a man was wanted for the honorable office of representative to the Congress of the United States. Inspired with the noble generosity which the young landowner had displayed, the people could now not only acknowledge his liberality about the lands, but could open their eyes to all his

other virtues — his graceful speech, his refined manners, his superior education.

"He's jist the man!" said Mr. Giles, emphatically slapping his knee, to give force to his assertion.

"He's jist the man!" echoed Mr. Carter.

"He's jist the man!" cried one and all — and they immediately made up their minds to run him as an independent candidate, and to work with all their might and main for his election, irrespective of party or party interest.

It was a curious instance of the unreliability of popular opinion — this almost religious enthusiasm of the masses in favor of the young man whom, one little year before, they had threatened with the gall, the tar-barrel, and the rope.

The history of his struggles with the squatters, and of the manner in which he had recommended himself to them, spread through the adjoining counties. Mr. Carter had nothing to do but to sit in his wagon, and talk people into voting for his son-in-law. Harry rose upon the highest wave of popular good-will. His praise was in everybody's mouth.

The influence of women was not wanting. How powerful that may become in the hands of one of the strong-minded of the sex, was proved by Debby upon this occasion.

She said nothing to any one about her plans, except that her nephew *should* be elected. For a week before the day of election, she, and those around her, were kept at a high pressure state of industry, cooking up enough provisions to feast an army. Never before had Giles' tavern held so fabulous an amount of "the best of every thing;" one small room, in the second story, was actually overflowing with pies and crullers alone, piled up to the ceiling.

On the decisive morning, she put on her dove-colored dress and best bonnet, and rode to the court-house, which had once witnessed the scene of the young man's trial, and before which were the polls. Here she announced to the assembling crowd, that every man who would assert upon his honor that he had voted for Harry Gardner that day, should have a free press at Giles' tavern to the best that the country could afford. This announcement was hailed with tremendous cheering, and she rode back again to see to the dinner, feeling that she possessed an invisible fund of influence which would greatly but irresistibly draw every voter worth having in her direction. And she was right. The double motive of a good man and a good dinner was too much for the wavering; and the regular candidates, seeing their own votes burst, like glittering soap bubbles, into a thousand atoms, concluded to cast their own votes in favor of their rival, and thus was a part in the grand free festival which was to be the feature of the day.

Upon the shoulders of the same men who once before, after his trial for murder, carried him off with the most horrible of intentions, Harry was lifted — against his will, certainly, but not so

much against it as on that previous occasion — and borne the entire

distance from the court-house to the grove in the rear of the tavern, where he was hoisted upon a platform, and compelled to make a speech.

It was a warm, delicious Indian summer day, and tables had been erected with the most impromptu speed in a choice spot of the grove where they received irregular ornamentation from the gorgeous leaves which dropped upon them, here and there, like brilliant entorches. A splendid carpet of the same beautiful material lay thickly upon the ground.

We venture to assert that not all the jewels and the gas lights, the hundreds of dollars' worth of decoration, at the last night's ball to His Royal Highness, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, gave more of merry, nor as much of enjoyment, as these simple ornaments which Father Nature hung around, above and beneath the tables spread for the political feasting of the rough wolverines. There was no heat to scold, no want of fresh air, there was abundance of room for all — the trees flared their royal banners, and hung out their golden candelabers, full only of the sunlight of heaven — the winds played a soft and whispering music, without any envy or jealousy of rival breezes, — and there was but a single reporter present to view "the occasion," with that satirical, humorous, wise, solemn, wondrous critical gaze, which so often proves this class superior to all mortal attempts to compete with them. And if we may believe this single reporter's enthusiastic account of the affair, in the next week's issue of the *Wolverine Blade*, that surprising faculty of viewing every thing through a crooked quizzing-glass, had not yet been attained by him.

The magnificence of money purchases some of the poorest enjoyments of life; no splendor of preparation, no *carte-blanche* to Belmonte, and dresses ordered from Paris, can be sure of a success superior to crowding, accident, criticism, and disappointment, — but Denay's *Levee* was a triumph which King and aristocracy might envy, if need, — while plans are to be the object of fisted gatherings.

But if species and habitats are increased, the movement of the "housewife," — out in the grand old woods, we mean — and busily busied, flying about with her hand-buckets, and bearing upon all, as she never could have done in the winter of her unwell-
and ill-fortune, — will be a little speech in favor of the people's soul-life
himself, which was received with loud, but not unreserved applause.

But I am not of the type; and if the alligments of a host like that has the tendency which brought over some who would not otherwise have ever left her, let wiser men of greater caution be sent, — they have ^{more} scars in their own eyes which should prevent their discovering this mote.

And this it was that our heroine, Is' Belle, went to Washington, and so she arrived in the city there, with a pure and simple business no more, and no more. The simple girl who prized so highly her single, and long-served silk dress, had beautiful dresses in abundance, and could choose out of a dozen satin, silk, or velvet

robes, that which suited her fancy for the time. But Susan was the same at Washington as she had been in her father's cabin, — gentle, pure, unpretending. She had one set of jewels, exquisite pearls which she had purchased in New York, on their way to the capital, with a sum of money made up by the squatters on the day of the dinner, and presented to her husband for the purchase of a bridal present to his wife.

While his only child was so far from him, moving in a sphere so different, Mr. Carter, a much less growling and dissatisfied man than formerly, boarded at Giles' tavern, and was made comfortable by Debby, as in the days of old. His arm gave him no pain, except a few twinges in damp weather; and as he had no occasion for work, beyond taking services in assisting Debby in her hurried days, the loss of its youthful strength was not very seriously felt.

The vacations were spent by the young married couple with Harry's mother, in New York, as journeying West, in those days, was a serious attempt; and it was not until the term of his office had expired, that Susan could offer her father a permanent home with them.

Debby made a glorious motherly; the fame of the tavern spread far and wide. She had no babies of her own, but her maternal instincts showed themselves in the quantities of fine socks she knitted, of winter evenings, for her niece's babies.

The part of Michigan which was the scene of those troubles and excitement, is now thickly settled and prosperous. Harry, having once got into the stream of politics, could not get to shore again, and has been wafted on from honor to honor; he still shines in the brilliant circles of the capital, and Susan, alternately smiling at home and abroad, is a fair, fresh matron, some of whose pretty daughters is sure to carry away her old distinction of being the Backwoods' Belle.

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